DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 550 CE 056 196

AUTHOR	Birch, D. W.; And Others
TITLE	A Study of Quality Assurance in NAFE. Stage 1 Report. Information Bank Working Paper Number 2499.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Staff Coll., Blagdon (England).
SPONS AGENCY	Manpower Services Commission, London (England).
PUB DATE	May 89
NOTE	60p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Continuing Education; *Educational Quality; *Employer Attitudes; *Evaluation Methods; Excellence in Education; Foreign Countries; *Government Role; Outcomes of Education; Postsecondary Education; Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; *Quality Control; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*England; Wales

ABSTRACT

This document reports Stage 1 of a study of quality assurance in nonadvanced further education in England and Wales. Stage 1 involved: (1) an assessment of the influence of external agencies and national examining bodies via a review of published documents and interviews with key personnel; (2) an exploration of the expectations and perceptions of employers through interviews; and (3) an exploration of the state of the art through a broad-brush audit of existing approaches to quality assurance in six colleges. The expected outcomes from Stage 1 were a greater appreciation of the components, dimensions, and measurement of quality and a better understanding of the processes involved and the resources required to design, develop, and implement improved systems of quality assurance. The report is organized in seven sections. Section 1 introduces the study; the meaning of the term "quality" is examined in Section 2 and a framework for assessing quality is established. The roles of various government agencies are outlined in Section 3, and the influence of three national examining and validating bodies is explored in Section 4. In section 5, the results of the audit of the six participating colleges are summarized, and the findings from a survey of 58 employers drawn from the areas of the six colleges are outlined in Section 6. Finally, in Section 7, conclusions are drawn from the work done in Stage 1 and a way forward to Stage 2 is suggested. Two appendices are included. (KC)

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The Further Education Staff College

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Working Paper

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Title

A study of quality assurance in NAFE stage 1 report

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May 1989

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A study of quality assurance in NAFE

STAGE 1 REPORT

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A Study of Quality Control/Quality Assurance in NAFE

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Section 2	Developing a Conceptual Framework
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Section 1

INTRODUCTION

This report arises out of a study of quality assurance in NAFE in England and Wales. Funded by the Manpower Services Commission (subsequently the Training Commission and now the Training Agency) it was intended that the study would be carried out in two stages over a two-year time scale.

The broad aims of the project are:

" (i) to investigate, evaluate and develop college systems for programme quality control and quality assurance in NAFE;

(ii) to study current approaches to product testing and quality assurance at a sample of colleges;

(iii) to assess the relationship between and effect of quality control and quality assurance and external factors such as the role and effect of examining/validating bodies and HMI;

(iv) to gain more information of employers' view on the quality of NAFE provision. "

Stage 1 (September 1987 to August 1988) involved:

* an assessment of the influence of external agencies such as Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and national examining and validating bodies via a review of published documentation and interviews with "key personnel";

* an exploration of the expectations and perceptions of employers through semi-structured interviews with 58 employers drawn from the "catchment areas" of each of the six participating colleges; and

* an exploration of the "state of the art" through a "broad brush" audit of existing approaches to quality assurance in six colleges.

The expected outcomes from Stage 1 were a greater appreciation of the components, dimensions and measurement of quality; and a better understanding of the processes involved, and the resources required, to design, develop and implement improved systems of quality assurance.

What is meant by the term "quality" is examined in Section 2 and a framework for assessing quality is established. The roles of HMI and of the Training Agency's Regional Further Education Advisers is outlined in Section 3; and the influence of three national examining and validating bodies (RSA, CGLI and BTEC) is explored in Section 4. In Section 5 the results of the "broad brush" audit of the six participating colleges is summarised; and the findings from a survey of 58 employers drawn from the catchment areas of the six colleges is

set out in Section 6. Finally, in Section 7 conclusions are drawn from the work done in Stage 1 and a way forward in Stage 2 is suggested.

The concerns and stance adopted in the project have been those of the manager. That education is an undeniably complex and open-ended business which is characterised by joint products and costs, uncertain and unanticipated outcomes and only partially understood processes is recognised. It is also accepted that large parts of the education process deny quantification. Nevertheless management is about coping with complexity and, where necessary, constructing simple models which enable purposeful action. The frameworks so far developed in the project are not claimed as the "end game" in quality control/quality assurance. Rather they constitute a base from which colleges may start.

Throughout Stage 1 the project team have been greatly helped by the encouragement and constructive criticism of the Steering Committee whose membership is set out in Appendix A.

The project reported here is only one of a number of projects concerning "quality" currently funded by the Training Agency. A list of these projects with a brief statement of the aims of each is provided in Appendix B.

Section 2

DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

What is Quality?

A study of quality control in colleges requires a rigorous definition of quality and some model of the process by which quality judgements are made for specific educational purposes in colleges. We can approach an understanding of what we mean by quality by analysing the judgmental process which is involved. Cuthbert (1988) in developing the issues identified in Moodie (1986) suggests the following questions to be asked about judgements of quality:

* By whom is the assessment made? For example, are the assessors internal or external to the college? Are they teachers, employers, students, trustees/governors or others?

* Through what structures and procedures is the assessment made ? Is it purely an individual judgement; are formal structure such as academic boards or course review teams brought into play; are informal or ill-defined processes at work as in "public opinion" etc?

* From what frame of reference? For example, rational-analytic and political perspectives employ different organising concepts and focus on different phenomena.

* Using what criteria? and Against what yardsticks? A criterion establishes a basis for judgement: for example, that performance should be assessed by reference to completion rates. A yardstick establishes a standard of performance which may or may not be achieved: for example, that the completion rate should be greater than 70%.

* For what purpose(s) is the assessment made? Every judgement of quality is a judgement for a purpose. The purpose may be individual or collective; it may be for justification or for improvement; and so on.

Our study is concerned to improve the management of quality in colleges of further education. It is focussed upon the development of formal structures and processes which are based on a rational-analytic frame of reference; and which make explicit the criteria and yardsticks to be employed and the purpose(s) of the exercise.

The basic definitions of "quality", "quality control" and "quality assurance" used in this study were originally taken from Knutton (1982) former Director General of the City and Guilds of London Institute. They are:

* "Control is an essential element of management. I use the word as a control engineer. This implies that I have sensors at key points in the system and that I am able to take

corrective action immediately whenever measurable deviations (positive or negative) occur. This ensures that the relationship between input and output remains as planned."

* "Quality to an engineer, at least, means conformance to requirements or fitness for purpose at an economic cost."

* "Quality Assurance is a positive approach which tries to ensure that things go right the first time."

Knutton's definitions of quality, quality control and quality assurance are on "all fours" with those set out by the British Standards Institution (BSI) in BS 4778 Part 1 (ISO 8402 - 1986) which are as follows:

" * Quality

The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs.

* Quality Assurance

All those planned and systematic actions necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality

* Quality Control

The operational techniques and activities that are used to fulfill requirements for quality. "

As explained in BS 4778 Part 2 the word "quality" is often used for several distinct purposes :

a) "comparative sense" or "degree of excellence" whereby products may be ranked on a relative basis sometimes referred to as a "grade" ;

b) "quantitative sense" as used in manufacturing product release and for technical evaluations sometimes referred to as "quality level"; and

c) "fitness for purpose sense" which relates the evaluation of a product or service to its ability to satisfy a given need.

Within the context of BS 4778 and in accordance with established usage in the quality assurance field, the word "quality" is used in this project in the "fitness for purpose sense".

The Joint Efficiency Study

Since 1980 the Audit Commission for local authorities in England and Wales has been charged with "securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness" in local authorities. Given the government's intention to reduce and restrict public expenditure, any increase in efficiency is seen to have the capacity for off-setting the more debilitating effects of expenditure cuts.

Early on in the process, further education with net expenditure of about £1500 million was identified as a prime target for investigation. During 1984 audits of 165 colleges were undertaken. The findings from this exercise are summarised in the Audit Commission' Report Obtaining Better Value from Further Education (1985). The Commission claimed to have identified "value improvement opportunities worth over £50 million per year (or) over £300,000 per college".

The Audit Commission's report has a number of deficiencies and has been the subject of highly critical reviews (see for example Birch and Latcham 1985). Nevertheless, it demanded a response from the Department of Education and Science and the local authority associations of England and Wales. This response took the form of a "joint" study of efficiency in further education. The report of this study group Managing Colleges Efficiently was published in 1987. A direct line may be traced from the report of the joint efficiency study through a consultative document Maintained Further Education: Financing, Governance and Law (DES 1987) to the Education Reform Act: Part II Higher and Further Education (1988). The Act will bring about a significant extension of the financial and managerial autonomy of colleges. In return, colleges will be expected to plan and control their resources more rigorously than they have in the past.

Despite the title of its report " Managing Colleges Efficiently", the joint study was concerned with both effectiveness and efficiency. The group considered that a college is effective to the extent that it produces outcomes which are relevant to the needs and demands of its clients: It becomes more efficient to the extent that it maintains these outcomes with fewer resources, or increases these outcomes with a less than proportionate increase in inputs. The group also believed that there was little point in examining the efficiency of an operation which was ineffective. So the first thing to be assessed must be effectiveness, and effectiveness can be monitored at the course level of aggregation through the following performance indicators:

(i) Enrolment

i.e. the number of students enrolled on the course/ course year

ratio: students enrolled/target enrolment

comparator: target enrolment

(ii) Completions

i.e. the number of students completing the course/ course year

ratio: students completing/students enrolled

comparator: target completion rate

(iii) Qualifications and Examination Success

i.e. the number of students on the course/course year gaining qualifications or passing examinations.

ratio: successful students/students enrolled.

comparator: target success rate

(iv) Progressions/Destinations

i.e. the number of students progressing to further or higher education or training or employment following completion of the course.

ratio: students progress/students completing

comparator: target progression rate.

The model of quality control which emerges from our study must embrace the performance indicators identified in Managing Colleges Efficiently. The recommendations of the joint efficiency study group have been accepted by the Government and have to be fully implemented by all colleges by 1992.

Towards a Framework

Cossu (1987) has contributed to a framework for quality control for colleges in France. Central to his argument are two dimensions of quality: the technical, objective, rational elements of the process which are observed using instruments which use cardinal numbered scales; and the marketing, subjective, reputational promotion of the product which may be monitored using ordinal scales. From these two sets of measures a profile may be drawn. Both sets of measures - quantitative and qualitative - are necessary for a complete statement about quality.

In Figure 1 (page 8) the two dimensions - quantitative and qualitative - have been incorporated into a quality control/assurance measurement matrix which is an adaptation and an extension of Cossu. The matrix incorporates the "effectiveness indicators" identified in the joint efficiency study. (However, a complete statement would also need to consider costs for "quality.....means conformance to requirements or fitness for purpose at an economic cost" (Knutton op cit). Where they are available the reports of the external examiners and moderators and of HMI would also need to be taken into account. HMI reports can be of various kinds: some are reports on a whole institution, some on sections or departments, and some just on a course and its students. Measurements of quality are possible at entry, during the course, at exit and post course. The objective of quality control/assurance is to bridge the gaps between the characteristics of the students at entry and the characteristics which are required at exit.

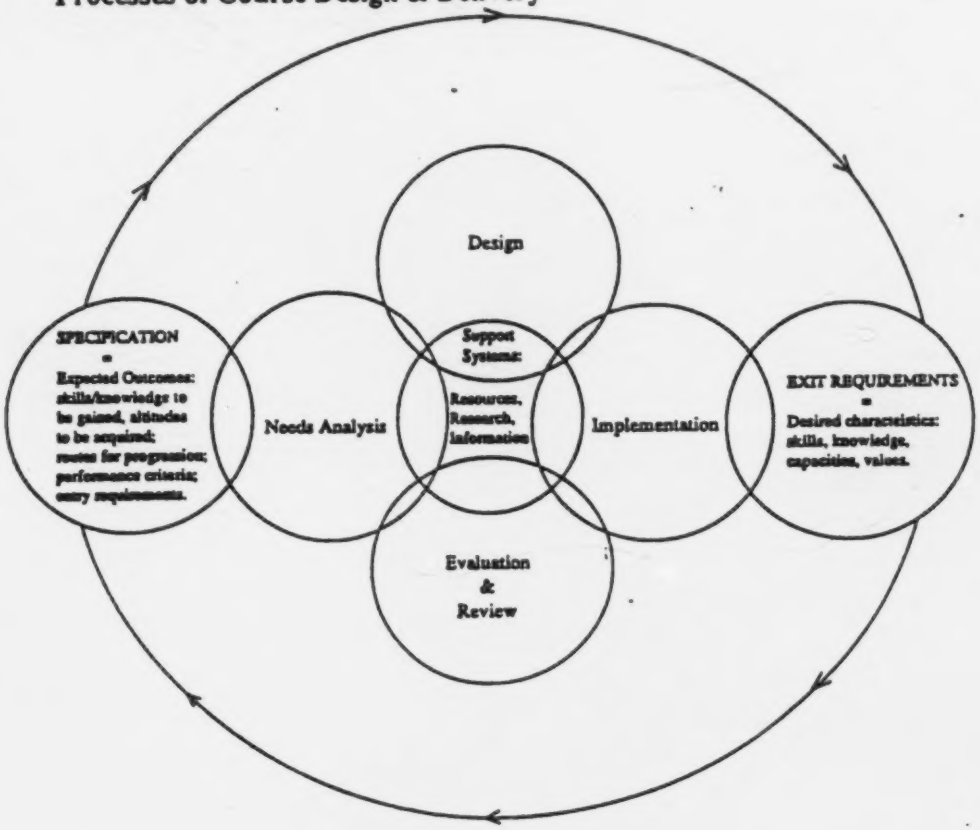
Figure 1

Quality Control/Assurance Measurement Matrix

Quality Dimensions	Measurement Points: Data: Concerns				Purpose	Measurement Processes	
	Entry	During Course	Exit	Post Course		Scale	Instruments
Quantitative Measures	Enrolments Pre-course/ selection tests	Completions Phase tests Formative assessments	Successes Summative tests	Destinations/ Progressions	Research on PROCESS.	Interval scale Cardinal numbers (1,2,3,...n)	[illegible] • Enrolments/Target Enrolments • Completions/ Enrolments • Successes/Enrolments • Progressions/ Enrolments Test instruments based on objectives/competences. Criterion - referenced rather than norm - referenced.
Qualitative Indicators	Student motivation to complete	Levels of satisfaction: values related to delivery modes: counselling services; formative assessments; feedback etc.	Levels of satisfaction: assessment methods; integrity of the programme.	Levels of satisfaction: validity of programme in terms of post-course experience.	Promotion of PRODUCT	Ordinal scale. Ordinal numbers. (1st, 2nd, 3rd,) low high	Entry/Exit interviews Value & attitude surveys (students and employers). Instruction ratings.
Quality Statements	Conservation of effort	Mastery of goals	Fitness for purpose	Continued productivity and learning	Adequacy of means and comfort with ends	Combined profile of characteristics	Course Review Periodic studies of the college as an enterprise based in part on a/b results.

Entry requirements for employment or for admission into higher education are the exit requirements certainly for full-time NAFE courses and are critical elements in a quality control system. The most important question in quality control/assurance is "Do you know the "true" requirements of the customer ?". (Ishikawa 1985). A "specification" of these requirements for a course prompts the curriculum processes (See FEU 1984) - needs analysis, design, implementation (selection, instruction, assessment), review and evaluation (Figure 2 page 9), The more detailed and exact the specification, the more likely it will be that students meet the end requirements.

Figure 2 **Processes of Course Design & Delivery**



Arguably the specification of the exit behaviour for NAFE should rest with employers and with higher education. Certainly the consequences of bad decisions to accept or reject applicants lie outside the college. However, the future of further education and the funding and resourcing for it depends in no small way upon satisfying the decision makers in industry and higher education, and colleges cannot afford to abdicate from the responsibility for establishing the clearest specification of end requirements. In this, as is noted elsewhere in this report, they are assisted by HMI and by the national examining and validating boards.

As defined by the BSI the "specification" is a document that prescribes the requirements with which the product or service has to conform. It should also indicate the means and the criteria whereby conformity can be checked. The specification is central to a system of quality control and quality assurance.

The question What is the Product? is a difficult one. There are two possibilities - the "course" and the "student". Subject to the constraints set by external examining and validating bodies, the design and implementation of a course or a programme of studies is within the control of the college. Some of the influences on the learning of the student - peers, parents, employers etc - may be found outside the college and outside its control. The outcomes attributable to the college and the college only are the focus, relevance, size and quality of the teaching programme. Consequently the main focus in our study has to be upon the course. However, in assessing the impact note has to be taken of individual student responses to the provision. These responses may be monitored by reference to test/examination results and attitude/opinion surveys as illustrated in Figure 1 (page 8) and by the

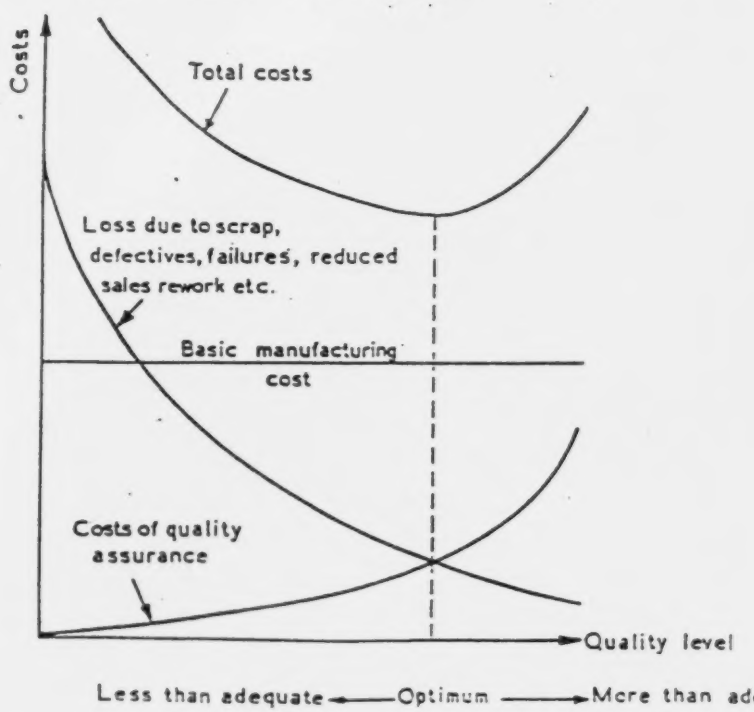
employability characteristics developed within the course as assessed by employers (particularly of the part-time courses), and by teachers using profiling assessments perhaps developed in consultation with employers.

Quality and Costs

There are three "cost centres" associated with quality assurance. The first and potentially the largest by far is the cost of not doing it right the first time every time - here called "defects in process". In education this cost is unlikely to be reduced to zero although "zero defect" is the conceptual goal of quality control (Ishikawa 1985). An estimate of this cost may be had by comparing the cost per student enrolled with the cost per successful student in any one year of a course. (Although such a comparison ignores the hidden personal costs to the student who is labelled as "unsuccessful" and also the "value added to the student who completes or partially completes the course but is unsuccessful in the end tests). The other two costs are incurred in trying to reduce the first cost. They are for the specific research and development, and preventive maintenance undertaken to reduce the "defects in process".

It is of course possible to produce a "graduate" whose achievements far exceed the end requirements. Indeed educationists would seek this outcome. In the case of higher education the pursuit of "excellence" is a declared aim. The situation in further education is less clear, however. Employers generally, and society certainly, can be expected to welcome overachievement. Perhaps the relevant question is "At what cost has this outcome been achieved ?". If the answer is "zero cost" there would appear to be no problem. The solution may be to so arrange the delivery of the curriculum that the "high flyer" can travel the route faster and progress to other things sooner: this possibility would improve the extent of the educational opportunities available to such students.

FIGURE 3 Economics of quality assurance



N.B. Quality level is defined by the BSI as follows:
"A general indication of the extent of departure from the ideal; usually a numerical value indicating either the degree of conformity or the

One of the basic management problems is to strike a balance between the cost and value of quality. **Figure 3** (page 10 - taken from BS 4891 : 1972 illustrates the economics of quality assurance assuming a constant basic production (delivery) cost. To the left of the optimum, opportunities to effect better quality have been missed such that losses due to defectives etc are higher than the cost of the solution and in this region "better" quality assurance costs less. To the right of the optimum, we have "perfectionism" and in this region "better" quality assurance is likely to result in higher total costs.

Total Quality Control/Assurance

As explained by the BSI (1987) if "quality assurance" is defined as "all these activities and functions concerned with the attainment of quality" (sometimes referred to as 'total quality control') rather than in the more narrow sense of the provision of proof associated with the word assurance, then it is concerned with all tasks from market research through to after sales service. As such it may involve external liaison, co-operation, and involvement with clients and customers and surveillance by independent certification authorities.

If "quality control" is defined as "a system for programming and co-ordinating the efforts of various groups in an organisation to maintain or improve quality at an economical level which allowes for customer satisfaction", then quality control is a subset of quality assurance.

Suppliers snould be prepared to institute such control of quality as is necessary to ensure that their products or services conform to customers' requirements and are delivered on schedule at the agreed price. For their part, customers should define clearly their own requirements preferably in the form of a specification detailing desired functional and operational characteristics. Alternatively, the customer might specify requirements in accordance with national standards or develop an agreed specification in conjunction with suppliers.

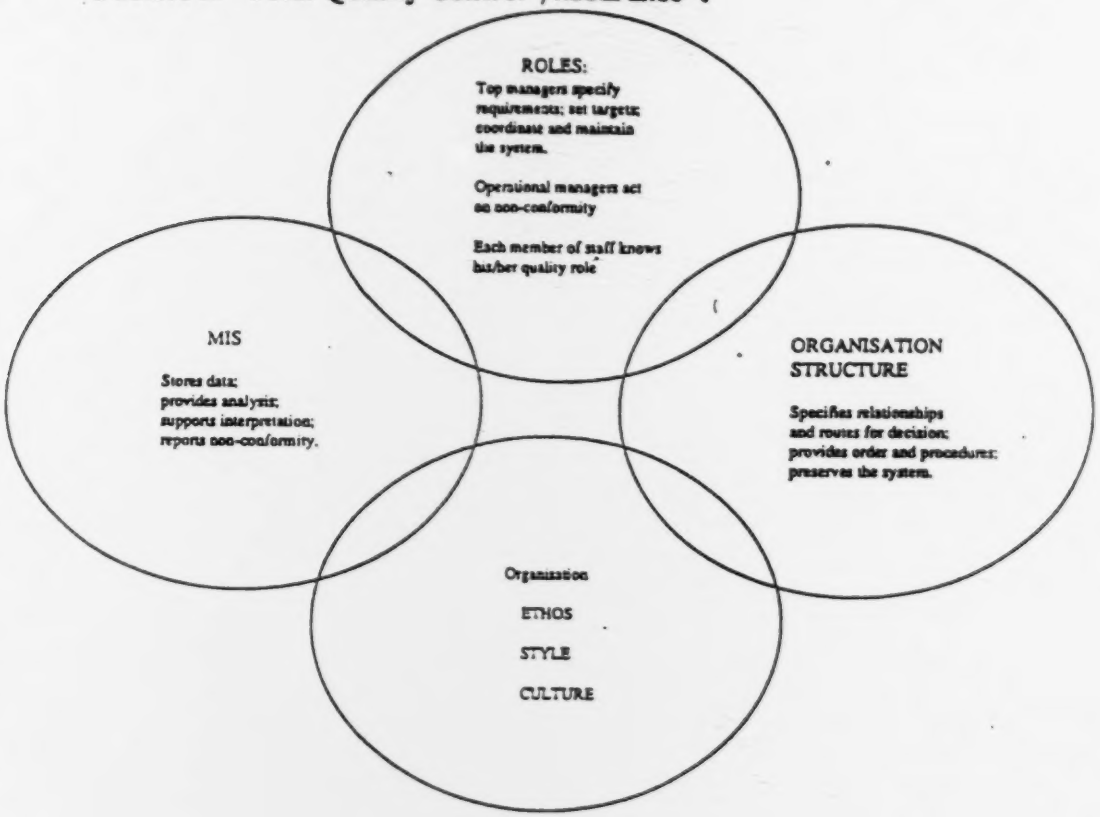
All activities and all functions in any undertaking and all personnel engaged in them are concerned with the attainment of quality and are inherently involved in quality assurance. Accordingly management should ensure that eacn person in the organisation:

* understands that quality assurance and quality control are important;
* knows how he/she can assist in the achievement of adequate quality; and
* is stimulated and encouraged to do so.

In sum the best results in quality assurance are acnieved when a concern for quality is demonstrated by everybody in the organisation. It is not sufficient to establish procedures for quality control and to designate quality controllers: the commitment to quality needs to be embedded in the collective mentality of the organisation at all levels of responsibility for delivery of the product. **Figure 4** (page 12) illustrates the situation. Top Managers set the requirements, the information system monitors conformity

and the organisation structure preserves the system. Operational managers act on non-conformity and all staff know their roles. Together they create the appropriate organisational ethos, style and culture.

FIGURE 4 Factors in "Total Quality Control /Assurance".



Conclusion

The first stage of the two-year study reported here aimed to explore the components and dimensions of quality and to obtain a better understanding of the processes involved in quality assurance in NAFE. The study takes a managerial perspective and started with the following propositions:

* that value for money is not synonomous with economy;
* that the ability to set targets and to measure effectiveness are signs of good management;
* that the first requirement of a manager for control is to know whether his/her system is OK/not OK and that the performance indicators recommended in Managing Colleges Efficiently are adequate for this purpose;

* but that to be correctly interpreted and used quantitative statements must not be divorced from qualitative statements.

As a result of a literature search and after intensive discussions with a range of interests including the DES, the Training Agency, LEAs, employers, examining and validating bodies, and college staff the project team added the following to their list of propositions:

* that the basic product being tested is the course but that in assessing the impact of the provision regard must be had to the performance of individual students enrolled on the course;

* that for NAFE the "exit requirements" are set by the needs of the workplace and/or of higher education;

* that a critical element in quality control/assurance is the "specification" which is drawn up to reflect the exit requirements;

* that the quality of the course is given by how well it matches the course specification;

* that quality control based on this "fitness for purpose" concept requires a system which provides feedback on both the process - curriculum design and implementation - and the promotion of the product - image, reputation etc;

* that quality assurance is provided through and by the preventative maintenance and the research and development activities undertaken to reduce the defects caused by not doing it right the first time every time;

* that it is necessary to strike a balance between the cost and value of quality; and

* that the best results in quality assurance are achieved when a concern for quality is demonstrated by everybody in the organisation.

Section 3

THE ROLES OF HMI, THE TRAINING AGENCY'S REGIONAL FE ADVISERS (RFEA) AND TRAINING STANDARDS ADVISORY SERVICE (TSAS)

The authority of Her Majesty's Inspectors is derived from the 1944 Act, which requires that all maintained institutions should be subject to inspection. This is what gives HMI their right of access to institutions and classes. In their work HMI are accountable directly to the Secretaries of State for their inspection activities, and they report directly to them. Not being accountable formally to the Department preserves for HMI a widely understood and valued independence of judgment and expression.

HMI's ostensible functions in inspection are to observe, assess and evaluate the work and educational progress of students in classes, and from this to build up a professional assessment of the effectiveness of the institution being inspected. This implies an understanding of and concern for objectives and standards. In its earliest days the Inspectorate was involved not only in reporting on pupils' learning attainments but also in providing assessments on which the "payment by results" system was based. That was in the days before systems of standardised tests and external examinations had been developed.

The Inspectorate in England [1] has a head office structure in which its senior management is largely functionally set up, with two of its seven Chief Inspectors concerned with FE/HE, supported by a team of Staff Inspectors, most of whom lead specialist subjects or discipline committees. Outside this group the Inspectorate is field deployed in a number of geographically defined Divisions, each headed by a Staff Inspector. FHE HMI are assigned to Divisions so as to achieve a balanced subject discipline coverage. Most of the 100+ FHE HMI have a specialist subject/discipline role in one (or more) Divisions, together with an assigned set of institutions as a general Inspector. Thus many work to two sorts of Staff Inspectors - specialist and territorial.

The professional concern of HMI within their specialist groupings is with observation of practice and standards in teaching and learning in subject/discipline areas, and sometimes in maintaining general professional contact with institutions and educational developments in one or more geographical Divisions. Inspection teams are brought together for formal inspections of specific institutions and surveys. These are planned and programmed together once a term.

Individual HMIs' time not allocated to programmed inspections or surveys is available for pastoral or liaison visits, or specialist visits to their assigned institutions. A substantial proportion of an Inspector's time is expected to be used in visits to institutions and their classes. In addition HMI have professional roles as observers or assessors, both nationally (eg professional bodies or examining bodies) and regionally (RACs, TC). Such contacts help HMIs to keep abreast of change and development in the FHE system.

1. In Wales, the organisation by inspection of FHE is more fluidly defined, with a small number of HMI having a specific specialist subject and general inspection roles, mostly carried alongside school assignments.

The outcomes of formal inspections and surveys generally take the form of published reports which are written for the Secretaries of State; they are also made available to the professional and lay public. HMI's published reports, and the inspections upon which they are based, form part of the system of information and checks and balances which act upon institutions, teachers, LEAs, and the various agencies which have professional roles in FHE.

In their reports the professional concerns upon which HMI chiefly focus are standards of achievement and performance in teaching and learning, professional approaches and competence, and the responsiveness and effectiveness of institutions and the system. Arising from their concentration on these concerns are contributions to the evaluation of quality in educational provision, assessment of trends in standards and subject developments, dissemination of good practice and the drawing of attention to weaknesses in teaching and in the system. HMI also contribute, through their teachers' short course programmes, to the professional development of teachers and of educational and institutional managers.

Although HMI rely in their work on their own professional assessment, their reports are generally accepted as objective and non-partisan. The judgments made in these reports are compiled by the "reporting inspector" (RI) from the contributions of the individual members of the inspecting team, each of whom relates his/her assessments of standards observed to her/his own variably internalised experience of standards across her/his specialist field. Setting these off against one another is the task of the RI in order to produce a balanced and accurate report.

HMIs' authority in the FHE field is not derived from any executive powers or functions, but rather from their role in advising the Secretaries of State in the exercise of their supervisory, regulatory and planning powers. In some of these, HMI may undertake an assessor or observer role with other agencies involved, such as the NAB and WAB, the TA, and CATE. The influence which individual HMI can exercise in the system, particularly those with SI roles and contacts, is also extended by similar assessor and observer roles to examining, validating, and professional bodies; industrial and training institutions; to development agencies such as FEU, FESC, NFER; and on Boards of Management, steering committees and working groups. HMIs influence has also been extended through publications, particularly in recent years of national survey exercises such as "NAFE in Practice" (HMSO 1987).

In most of these spheres, HMIs' influence is simply one of many significant professional groups or agencies, though admittedly the HMI network of specialist contact and influence is the largest in terms of both scale and breadth of coverage.

The most direct influence of HMI arises out of their right of access to colleges and to classes, and the systematic programme of inspections and surveys. These ensure that HMI are constantly in contact with curricula and teaching and with the practical implementation of new developments.

During a formal inspection there is a wealth of opportunity for personal contact, for critical and constructive evaluation, and for feedback of observation, counselling and guidance. Here the impact is very direct and largely classroom focussed: it is generally organised and systematic and is almost wholly concerned with process. Between inspections, however, HMIs' influence tends to be rather more remote.

The basis of HMIs' approach to the assessment of quality and of standards lies in visits to classrooms, labs, studios and workshops, working with teachers, observing classroom processes, inspecting files of students' work and their marking. Typically, there are discussions with teachers and students about schemes of work drafted in response to syllabuses and guidelines published by external bodies, and in transactions with moderators and external examiners or assessors. HMI engage with teachers in analysis and evaluation of assignments and assignment strategies, and students' responses to them; and of the effectiveness of feedback from teachers' marking and further use, reinforcement and enrichment of assignments. There are discussions of the relevance of both classwork and assignments to the vocational needs of the course/qualification, and of the employers or professional bodies. In these discussions HMI may gain an impression of the teacher's knowledge and contacts with the local and national vocational employment/qualification developments. HMI also assess the quality of the teaching and learning environment, and the college's or the department's learning support systems, and the students' reactions to them.

In all this, the assessments made are characterised by the subject orientation and vocational course background of most individual HMI with FE experience, underpinned by their own professional teaching experience. A further influence is the continuously developing inspectorial culture (for example what signs to look for in identifying good or weak practice, what factors contribute most powerfully to assessment of quality). A degree of additional conditioning occurs in team and committee approaches and perceptions, influenced by involvement with validating bodies such as BTEC, and discussions with college staff engaged in curriculum redesign. This has been a feature of team approaches to evaluation of courses as integrally designed curricula concerned with higher order learning objectives. Among these are competences displayed in realistic practical situations; practical applications of theory in labs and workshops and cross-discipline problem-solving or design exercises.

From their reports and publication, HMIs' pragmatic concerns appear to be with evaluating and making comparisons of standards and quality between institutions and over time, and hence with the maintenance of standards. They may also involve the use of professional judgment in attributing outcomes in terms of quality and standards to causes enshrined in policy issues such as LEAs' financial/expenditure patterns, institutional efficiency indicators, enhanced managerial capacities and systems, training and staff development, and curriculum strategies.

Between inspections, HMIs' contact with institutions tends to be intermittent. A proportion of such contact may involve visits to classes or courses leading to some assessment of process quality or effectiveness of response. However, visits will inevitably be to only a sample of the courses and classes actually in progress.

Yet institutions often ascribe to HMI a formative role in relation to assessment of quality. HMI are expected, even following quite brief pastoral visits, to give a view of the quality of what they have seen. These views are generally taken to be based on established criteria of inspectorial origin. On the occasion of more formal inspections, particularly, the HMI team and their RI and SI leaders may be expected to play a significant part in the evaluation of both the institution's teaching processes and its quality

assurance systems. It is the articulation and use of criteria for assessing quality in teaching processes which may be taken to represent the particular contribution of HMI in a formative sense. In some of their recent publications, for example in the series "Education Observed", HMI have accepted this function in the large.

In general, therefore, HMI may be seen in institutions as one of the sources of quality criteria to be tapped when planning, designing, developing or reviewing their course and curriculum delivery. One of the most important elements in their contribution and one which is almost uniquely characteristic, lies in their insistence on observing and assessing the students' classroom and workfile response to the teaching itself. HMIs' concern even in vocational education is broadly rather than narrowly focussed, on what students, given their various starting points, derive personally, socially and academically from their further education experience.

The Training Agency's (TA's) Regional FE Advisers (RFEA)

Direct responsibilities for activities in WRNAFE remain in the hands of the Area Managers (AMs), coordinated by a set of Regional Directors (RDs), themselves accountable to the TA's Policy and Programmes Directorate in Sheffield, with its FE Branch. To provide these echelons with professional support and advice, a cadre of nine Regional FE Advisers (RFEAs) have been appointed. For the most part the advisers have had professional experience in FE, as teachers, college managers (Principals, VPs), LEA FE Officers, or HM Inspectors. The RFEAs work to the Regional Directors, and liaise with the TA's FE Branch, the development unit which is responsible for the TA's policy on further education. There is a similar, though not identically organised, group of TVEI Advisers.

From the job description of RFEAs, it is clear that they have:

* roles in provision of professional advice, support (to RDs and AMs) and developmental initiatives related to NAFE planning at RAC and LEA/AM levels;

* involvement in advice and evaluation of NAFE development plans and annual programmes, especially in assessing whether they meet employment needs;

* responsibilities in assessing and monitoring mutual development fund projects and proposals;

* liaison functions with RACs, LEAs, industry-education links and professional programmes under YTS, TVEI, and TRIST/GRIST;

* roles in TA staff training and development, and in dissemination of good practice in the field; and

RFEAs are also involved in providing similar advice and support in relation to developments and participation on the part of FE in TVEI schemes and programmes.

About a third of the time is spent in the field, in LEA and other offices, in conferences, courses and other professional occasions, and in visits to FE institutions; some 40% is spent in TA meetings and offices, either to do with WRNAFE planning including decisions and negotiations with LEAs, with the central reserve project briefings and evaluations, or with TVEI or other developments. About a quarter is devoted to TA etc training and professional briefing activities. There is naturally some variation between RFEAs on the composition and prioritising of their work schedules.

In their general working operations, it is noticeable that RFEAs work on their own, and not in teams; though they report internally to the VET administrative echelons, and to the Area managers. In the field, their activities and interactions are largely with FE officers and advisers and with college senior management figures. They provide professional comment and advice on current developments in conferences and inservice seminars. Their role in dealing with central reserve fund proposals and projects gives them continuing contact with policy outcomes particularly in development contexts. Apart from the informal feedback provided by these contacts, they use a variety of information sources, some of them standard returns (such as FESR and AMS), some of their own devising.

In assessing LEA and college provision RFEAs complete a questionnaire which is divided into sections as follows:

* the planning process-levels of involvement, changes from previous year's planning, an evaluation of the quality of planning;

* progress towards process objectives, in the following areas:

  - consultation with employers;

  - use of relevant labour market intelligence (LMI), occupational coverage, demographic trends;

  - employment of product and market development cycle techniques;

  - identification of, and responsiveness to, client groups and their needs;

- staff development related to above;
- implementation of JES costing procedures;
- progress in JES monitoring of key performance indicators;
- development of adequate MIS;

* quality improvement, evidenced by involvement in projects, such as the Responsive College Programme;
* coherence of provision;
* responsiveness to equal opportunities and special needs;
* curriculum and delivery development, eg into open learning and information technology;
* provision and capacity (student numbers, courses, classes); and
* effectiveness of monitoring of progress towards plan/programme targets.

Until recently, the concern of the RFEAs with quality has been expressed through their monitoring of a range of indicators, rather than through any direct involvement or intervention in the professional processes of teaching and learning. No regular, programmed visits to classes or workshops have been undertaken, nor has there been any evaluation of teaching outcomes as such - that is, of the workfiles of students/trainees. There appears to have been no systematic assessments of comparative standards, of levels or quality of achievement, between institutions, other than in terms of course or examination outcomes. Given the limited resources of the RFEA group there seems little prospect of their more direct involvement in evaluating activities in classrooms, labs and workshops; or in examining a sufficiently large sample of students' work to arrive at a judgement of the levels and comparability of attainment.

Currently RFEAs are seeking to ensure that self regulating procedures and processes - such as annual course reviews - are in place and working effectively. To achieve this would involve entering into some form of professional dialogue with LEAs and colleges. A second approach, which might be undertaken alongside the first, would involve selecting a theme or topic related to quality, and undertaking a systematic assessment of competence or progress in that area. An example of this second approach is the NAFE student information systems project which will involve the systematic collection and analysis of data from a significant sample of "early leavers" and "completers". Both approaches are at an early stage of development.

The Training Agency's (TA's) Training Standards Advisory Service (TSAS)

The TSAS was established in September 1986, following a proposal by the then Manpower Services Commission (now the Training Agency) in its 1985 report to Government on the further development of the Youth Training Service. This proposal was to provide for an independent means of assessment of the quality of the training provided in the YTS in its new 2-year format.

The service as set up comprises a group of staff with backgrounds in education and/or training, having appropriate professional qualifications, and recruited mainly from industry or commerce. Initially its main role was to assess the effectiveness of YTS by carrying out inspections and surveys of schemes in operation: The findings of these are conveyed in the form of reports (not generally published as yet) concerned primarily with programme quality. In April 1987 the remit of the Service was extended to include a quality assurance role in the new Job Training Scheme (NJTS). Preparations are being made for TSAS involvement in Employment Training, (ET) the successor programme being introduced from September 1988.

The TSAS has been set up as a field force, under a Sheffield-based Director who reports directly to the Director General of the Training Agency, with a right of direct access to the Chairman. Supported by a small head office staff, the Director is responsible for the Service's organisation and field deployment, which is independent of the line management and Area structure of the TA's field operation and organisation.

In the field, the TSAS is organised into 4 divisions - Scotland; Northern England; Central England and Wales; and Southern England. Each has a Divisional office under a Divisional Manager. The 32 Training Standards Inspectors (TSIs), and the 6 appointed more recently for extending the service to cover adult training, are each assigned to these divisions, and within them to designated geographical areas (see organisation chart at Appendix D). Preparations are in train, once the ET system has been fully set up for all the TSIs to be made responsible for inspections of both YTS and ET schemes in their areas. This is likely to be operational by mid-1989.

The field deployment and operations of TSIs are thus largely on a generalist, rather than a specialist, basis. However, in appointing them the TSAS Directorate took also into consideration their individual expertise/background in specific industrial or commercial fields, or professional specialism in educating and training, so that collectively they provide a spread of expertise and professional qualification across most discipline areas. To some extent, this is intended also in the divisions.

Compact administration and support teams have been set up at head office and divisional offices, and these are linked by a computer network. The office set-ups are designed to provide general office support for information and clerical processing and production, with objectives concerned with:

- rapid and reliable production of reports and information;
- maintenance and efficient access to all use of data systems; and
- inter-office communication.

Most TSI's home offices have now been fitted with personal computers fully networked into the system, and many have already found considerable savings on report writing time as well as improvements in communication of information and messages, and access to databases.

TSAS inspection programmes are drawn up on a 6-monthly basis, the operational objective being to inspect all approved YTS Training Organisations in a 5-year period or cycle. In practice experience has indicated that the cycle is likely to be somewhat longer. Similar plans are being drawn up for the ET system.

The procedures by which an inspection visit is organised are similar in some respects to those employed by HMIs. Two types of inspections may be distinguished. An Approved Training Organisation (ATO) or scheme which is wholly located in one geographical area is usually visited and inspected by the local TSI, occasionally helped, if the load of work to be seen is large, by a neighbouring TSI. Where a scheme is the responsibility of a national scale organisation with geographically dispersed operations (eg Boots, Remploy) a team inspection is programmed. In this case, one TSI is designated to take the lead role. This involves taking responsibility for preparations, provision of information and pre-inspection meetings with both TA field staff from Area and Regional offices and scheme managements, to inform them, to clarify procedures and inspection requirements, and jointly to identify aspects which may require particular attention. In such cases the lead TSI has responsibility for deployment and briefing of the team in the inspection, for collating the individual TSI reports and for reporting the overall outcomes, both orally at the end of the visit, and later in the written report, which he or she has responsibility for compiling as a balanced account of the team's findings.

According to the TSAS first annual report, during the first full year of operation (1987/8) the TSAS inspected 413 ATOs and 508 YTS programmes. There were also 42 introductory and review visits to NJTS (adult training) schemes, and 13 to selected Community Programme schemes. Some of the ATOs were FE colleges, and numbers of the schemes involved FE colleges as providers of off-the-job training. Thus these inspections included visits to FE colleges, though often in practice the time available for inspection of off-the-job components was limited.

The inspection programme is initiated from TSAS head office with a directive indicating any policy priorities or specific categories of scheme in management's mind, and individual TSIs are expected to respond with suggested ATOs or schemes for inclusion, submitted through Divisional offices. Divisional managers work closely with the TA's regional directors and Area Office staff in the selection of ATO's and schemes to be submitted for inclusion in the overall inspection programme. There are considerable inputs of information at local and regional levels in the preparation of pre-inspection documentation.

Each inspection is programmed for a specific number of days (the average is about 5). During the visits, TSIs take the opportunity to meet with scheme organisers, trainees, and their supervisors, work experience providers and tutors (including FE college staff), and other involved in contributing to the training, as well as inspecting the work and assessing the progress of trainees.

Although there has been considerable discussion among TSIs and their management of methods of inspection and criteria for evaluation of the organisation and structuring of YTS schemes, their control and management in operation, and their effectiveness in performance and outcomes, there has as yet been no formal decision to use standard aide-memoires for inspection. Conferences and seminars have, however, led to agreed guidelines for both the conduct and writing up of inspections, and the content and criteria of evaluations of effectiveness and standards of what is seen on inspections. The extent to which these refer explicitly to FE elements and components in schemes is limited, though explicit attention is given to the assessment of integration between off-the-job and on-the-job elements. Separate guidelines for use in inspections of FE colleges which are themselves managing agents have not been developed.

Following each inspection a report is produced presenting the main findings and setting out the TSI's recommendations in relation to any aspects of the training programme and its delivery which are considered to need further development or improvement. These recommendations are advisory, in accordance with the TSAS's role, and it is understood that it is for the Area Office staff and those of the ATO to work out between them how to respond to and implement them. Normally, the Area Office and ATO staffs are given sight of a draft of the report before it is passed for issue, so that they may have the opportunity to comment or make suggestions. But it is for the lead TSI responsible for the report to accept and respond to or incorporate any such comments or suggestions in the final report. This procedure is designed to assure for the TSAS its independent status, in much the same sense as HMI's.

The format of TSAS reports varies somewhat between TSIs. Although some are lengthy and contain descriptive and illustrative material as well as evaluation, most are shorter and designed to convey little by way of description or explanation, concentrating more on comment and recommendations on the various aspects and components of schemes, the trainees' experiences and progress/attainments, and the effectiveness of recording and control of them. Some reports are explicitly designed for "reporting by exception".

During these early years of the TSAS's operations and development, its reports are not being published openly. They are at present issued only to those "closely connected" with the schemes inspected. It is anticipated that the TA will shortly be asked to decide on the question of open publication of TSAS inspection reports.

Six months after a report is issued, Area Office staff are requested to report on the scheme's progress in implementing its recommendations. Some of these may involve direct, specific action. However, most are likely to have implications for ongoing, professional development, or for medium term development plans agreed between ATO's and the Area Offices, whose field staff (eg Local Programme Assessors - LPA's) are generally in continuing contact with schemes. Feedback of this kind is regarded by the TSAS as important for evaluation of their own professional impact and role in the field.

TSAS reports are also seen in TA HQ and particularly by its Programme Quality Branch, with whom TSAS maintain close liaison. The general issues raised in reports are seen as contributing to quality and related professional policies. One important argument for wider publication of TSAS reports is the means this would give for TSAS to contribute to the dissemination and highlighting of good practice professionally. At present the restriction of publication

means that good practice examples are likely to be disseminated/transferred only by specific TA or Area Office channels or training involvements. A significant innovation in this respect has been the publication of a TSAS review of "good practice and emerging trends" from the West Midlands Region, with extracts culled from TSI inspection reports.

It is perhaps too soon to expect this newly established professional advisory service to have any significant corporate impact or influence on the FE system. Individual TSIs may well have become known and professionally accepted figures among particular colleges and their staff members who have specific responsibilities for YTS provision. This will be more the case for those colleges who are managing agents themselves. But considerable numbers of colleges will not as yet have been visited by a TSI, and for many who have the visits may well have been only for a day or two. As the TSAS progress through their 5-year cycle, this statistically limited contact will be extended and TSIs will become better known as visitors; but even then the rate of visiting is unlikely to match that of, say, the BTEC moderators. When TSIs take on responsibility for inspecting ET schemes there may be further opportunities for contacts and professional exchanges of views and assessments. But this is all prospective, and the question of what corporate role, objectives and approaches the TSAS might take on with respect to the FE system, or how it might wish to channel its influence, through professional liaison, publication or other involvements, appears to have no answers at present.

At the level of TSI inspection of and reporting on particular ATOs and YTS schemes, professional contacts with FE college staffs can lead to useful discussions of contents and standards of schemes, in particular the off-the-job components. The approach of TSIs to inspecting and evaluating effectiveness are likely to be observed and discussed among college staffs. They will become aware of instruments and aide-memoires being used and may benefit from observing any systematic applications of methodologies and criteria. There will be one area of inspection on which the TSI visit is likely to concentrate in which there may well be particular interest and impact - that of integration of learning experience off-the-job with experience, attainment and learning at work. College tutors may be expected to show particular interest in the TSI's approach and criteria in assessing this. It is likely, however, that the impact will be less in visits which are very short. Much will therefore depend on the structuring of TSI's visits to colleges, and on the effort TSIs put into feeding back their comments and reports to colleges. At present it seems that it is up to scheme managers to involve FE college staff in post-inspection meetings and discussions of the report, though individual TSIs generally undertake an informal discussion with YTS tutors at the end of any visit day. More complete and structured post-inspection discussions and reporting arrangements are of course undertaken following inspections of managing agent colleges.

It appears at this stage that much of the professional contact and feedback between TSIs and colleges and the FE system at LEA and regional levels is left to the discretion of individual TSIs themselves. They may, for example, respond to invitations to contribute to meetings of committees, working groups and inservice training courses and seminars. At present much of this contact is relatively informal, and the TSAS management has a generally cooperative attitude to involvement and contact with the FE service. The specific quality issues concerning YTS in FE may be expected to emerge only after some years of experience and reporting.

Section 4

THE INFLUENCE OF THE NATIONAL EXAMINING AND VALIDATING BODIES

Three national examining and validating bodies were selected for investigation: the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI); the Royal Society of Arts (RSA); and the Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC). These three bodies account for most of the vocational education and training (VET) in NAFE.

The City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI)

The CGLI was established in 1878 and is Britain's largest technical and vocational testing and certificating body. The structure of the CGLI and the requirements of its Royal Charter provide for a dual system of accountability. The National Council is elected by and reports back to an annual general meeting of Institute members - corporate (founding livery companies and sponsoring bodies from industry) and individual - assuming internal (industrial) accountability. External (public) accountability is achieved by reporting annually to the Privy Council.

Twenty one National Advisory Councils (NACs) covering industrial sectors and with a membership drawn from users of CGLI services (employers) advise on what sorts of schemes should be offered and what forms of competence should be recognised. In addition there are a number of subject orientated NACs concerned with competencies that straddle several/all sectors - for example communication and numeracy skills. Advice on particular specialisms which apply only in relatively small sectors - toy making, soft furnishings etc - comes directly from individual sponsor companies. The market-orientated NACs determine what industry needs. Subject (product)-orientated examination sub-committees are responsible to them for advice on course content and competence levels. When NACs indicate that training needs are changing because of altered industrial and economic circumstances, separate ad hoc sub-committees are set up to devise new courses and competence levels.

The CGLI offers a variety of qualifications in a broad range of vocational areas. It administers some 1400 examinations with around 7500 examiners responsible for about 500,000 candidates annually. Candidates may "qualify" at a variety of levels and there is a "ladder" of certification from general vocational preparation through to specific vocational training and career extension courses.

The CGLI adopted a policy of competence-based rather than cognitive-based certification in 1977. The subject committees having set out what needs to be tested - the specification - the professional staff of CGLI design, develop and test the assessment instruments required to produce the evidence the subject committees want. Examiners then devise their assessments using these instruments where appropriate in the light of the specification.

Some 46-48% of assessment is now carried out at the local level (in teaching centres which may be a college,a military base or within the training arm of a large company). There is increasing use of student record books which spell out the criteria for passing a particular test so that students should be able

to work out when they are able to complete specified tests/tasks. In some cases there may not be a 'confirmatory' test to check the practical abilities of the students, so these log books act as a record of progress and achievement on the part of student and teacher. The CGLI will accept evidence of competence from the workplace or teaching centres, and each book contains a certificate which has to be completed by the tutor and by the sponsor (employer, managing agent) to show that the student record is accurate. Actual tests are designed to assess a student's ability to perform tasks, retain knowledge, and demonstrate a coherent understanding of the processes involved.

Reliance upon the professional integrity of the teacher is underscored by visiting assessors (other teachers/employers) who monitor the assessments by teachers of student. Assessors visit each local centre two or three times a year. A poor report is taken up with the college principal or the senior management in the workplace. When a centre proposes an alternative syllabus in response to local employer needs, consultant assessors discuss the scheme and its assessment with the centre providing an element of national control.

The CGLI does not specify teaching methods: its concerns are with syllabuses and with testing/assessment. It aims to assure employers that the holders of its certificates have displayed competence in the tasks likely to be required of them at work and some understanding of the processes in which they will be involved.

The CGLI's main concern is to ensure constant and consistent testing methods, since its contract is with the student as candidate for a particular certificate. It is only interested in whether students are able to succeed in the 'exam', which should effectively match their abilities to current occupational requirements, which have themselves been defined (on the advice of employers) in the syllabus. This 'fitness for purpose' approach should assure potential employers that applicants have displayed competence in the tasks likely to be required of them in work, and some understanding of the process in which they are to be involved.

Test specialists at the CGLI who write the manuals on assessment are frequently called upon by the TA and the NCVQ to ensure that public statements about examination and education policy conform with current practice, or explain why they do not. They also train examiners and visiting assessors in examination methods, and negotiate with individual companies and individual's clients about testing for their own internal, rather than national certification, purposes.

A team of researchers investigates international developments in testing methods, feeding their findings to those concerned with test development and testing services, who in turn relay it to those servicing subject committees.

This network of support sevices is intended to act as a filtering and refining process, subjecting CGLI instruments and practice to constant critical review, and screening out dubious assessment methods - a methodological system that complements the quality control exercised by 'customer industries' through the CGLI committee structure.

CGLI results are made public, and its computer systems now allow for a breakdown of results by teaching/training centre. It considers that there is

a high level of satisfaction among teachers, students and employers about its qualifications and results - only 0.4 percent of exam results are ever challenged. The CGLI makes no specific study of student progression in employment or continued education other than through its contacts in industry.

The Royal Society of Arts (RSA)

Founded in 1750 as the Society for the Encouragement of Arts Manufacturers and Commerce, the RSA has been the main examining body for office skills and other commercial subjects since 1856.

In the academic year 1986-7 there were over 621,000 entrants to RSA exams (a slight dip on the previous year), the majority of whom undertook single subject exams at different levels.

In October 1987 the Examinations Board was reconstituted as an autonomous company, limited by guarantee with charitable status. The new Board has 25 members, drawn from industry, commerce and the teaching profession. An Executive Committee of nine handles the Board's day to day business. There is a separate Educational Policy Committee serviced by sectoral Advisory Committees, whose members are drawn from both sides of industry and the professions.

A Certification Committee devises, verifies and approves qualifications and performance criteria, supervises curriculum development and assessment procedures, and receives reports from subject-oriented Scheme Committees comprised of practitioners in the field. These are responsible for working out the substance and detail of subject aeas, up-dating programmes, taking into account decisions by the Policy Committee on curriculum development etc. This is a departure from past practice where advisory committees might have responsibility for advising on and approving programmes, although there is some cross membership between the various committees.

The RSA committee structure allows for constant review of content and standards of assessment within RSA qualifications, but syllabi, standards and assessment procedures remain static over each academic year to ensure uniformity in the qualifications awarded.

The RSA publishes very detailed syllabi, with equally detailed notes for teachers on precisely what skills or tasks students should be expected to demonstrate by the end of the course. The aim is to ensure that qualifications give a clear indication of the extent to which a student is able to apply knowledge.

Employers, teachers and examiners try to establish what it is reasonable to expect students to attempt at the various 'levels' represented by the range of RSA qualifications. Each task/skill is broken up into achievable segments which are identified in the guidelines for teachers. The RSA runs workshops for teachers to ensure that they understand what is required of them, particularly when there are changes in syllabi and assessment methods.

The RSA's Integrated Schemes (task-based vocational and pre-vocational programmes) are revised and up-dated regularly to take on board modifications in tasks and skills brought about by changing work practices and technology.

New or revised programmes are then tested through Pilot Schemes, often in a

work setting, from which standards of competence are derived. Thus Marks and Spencer have been directly involved in defining the standards for RSA qualifications in Retail Distribution. There is a structured system of assessment for such test-runs involving meetings between the RSA and local pilot centres. The revised course and documentation is then available for the following year.

Guidance on new subject or skills areas, occupational trends, and educational developments are provided by the Educational Policy Committee and its advisors, which include teaching and employer repesentatives.

RSA single subject examinations assess competence at three levels:

Stage I indicates a basic knowledge;

Stage II indicates sound undertanding and competence, and suggests a student is likely to benefit from further study (recommendation for employment);

Stage III indicates a good all-round knowledge, and a high degree of proficiency in practical skills.

In addition to the simple subject examination RSA offer a number of integrated (work-based) schemes,and a range of higher Diploma and Advanced Awards.

Some single-subject exams involve an element of course work which is assessed locally with RSA-appointed Moderators monitoring the assessment according to detailed guidelines. A large number of professional bodies accept Stages II and III either as qualifications for entry as the equivalent of GCE/GCSE passes, or as entitling exemption from elements of their own examining arrangements.

Moderating committees of teachers, often assisted by employers, sift submissions for examination papers and test them for consistency with the syllabus and to ensure that the language is appropriate to those sitting the examination. Examiners/markers and assessors meet to agree a consistent methodology for marking, effectively setting the standards for passes. In addition to their own batches of papers, assistant examiners may also mark a random selection of papers as part of the monitoring process, and a selection of papers and marks go to chief examiners who can make adjustments. Papers felt to have been inconsistently marked are then remarked.

RSA Integrated (work-based) qualifications are offered through schools and colleges and in-house training schemes, usually in larger companies. The Clearing Banks, Marks & Spencers, British Rail, the House of Fraser, and the Bank of England are among companies now accredited RSA 'centres' for integrated schemes.

Before granting recognition to a new centre, the RSA visits to ensure that facilities, staff and locally devised training programmes offer students appropriate opportunities to learn and demonstrate the task competencies that are to be certificated. The RSA supplies guidelines on what is to be expected of centres and students, and how improvements to the programme can be made.

External Assessors are appointed, who then pay three visits to centres during the course of each programme being offered. Their reports cover any shortcomings or additional requirements felt to the essential. Centres not meeting the deadlines set for improvements to be completed may lose accreditation, but the RSA aims to be positive and supportive in its approach, and offers regular regional staff development programmes. Both the sanction and back-up are seen as the best way of protecting students' interests although the RSA sees its function as dealing with the deliverer, who has the primary responsibility to students.

Assessors monitor the suitability of local Accreditors nominated by centres to verify the abilities of students. They are expected at least to be experienced in whatever competences are to be tested, and their accreditation of task competence throughout the programme is kept under review.

The contact point for Assessors is a Centre Co-ordinator who is held responsible for monitoring all Accreditors in the centre to ensure standardisation, making sure that RSA criteria for competence are adhered to, and handling the administrative side of the programme. While the RSA monitors such appointments, it views the Centre Co-ordinator, whether course team leader, personnel officer or shop manager, as the person in whom the institution invests its confidence.

On their final visit Assessors must review and agree all entries in Cumulative Assessment Records (CARs), the log books provided for trainess by the RSA, which spell out the criteria for competence expected of them and remain their personal property. The CAR system, introduced two years ago, is seen as a means of both encouraging students to negotiate their own progress with those who verify their competence, and supplying the RSA with the evidence on which final certification is based. Each log book records those tasks which have been accredited, monitored by the Centre Co-ordinator and approved by the Assessor. Students appear to have welcomed this innovation and proved themselves better able than some teachers and Accreditors at knowing when they have achieved the set criteria. The CAR requires Accreditors to be explicit about a student's competency or lack of ability, and while a student may appeal against the Accreditor as part of the review procedure, the CAR entry provides an indication of what additional work or training is required if a full certificate is to be awarded.

The Assessor is able to ask for substantive evidence of competence. For example, if an entry states that a student has successfully operated a cash till roll for six months and received a testimonial to that effect from an employer, the Assessor may ask to see the till rolls, the testimonial, or the Accreditor who verified the student's competence.

Employers are well-represented within the committee structure of the Examinations Board. They are encouraged to participate in the (re)formulation of criteria for the achievement of specific tasks and to sit on advisory committees, but the RSA retains responsibility for the technical aspects of examination - final approval of standards and content, the structure of exam papers, marking systems and supervision of assessors.

Employers are seldom directly involved in setting exams, and have been content to criticise the finished product in the past. They now tend to be much more specific about the tasks required of employees, and the RSA feels they have renewed confidence in the value and validity of its (work-based)

qualifications, because programmes are closely linked to current employment practice.

The Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC)

BTEC was formed at government instigation in 1983 through a merger of the Technician Education Council and the Business Education Council. Unlike the CGLI and RSA, BTEC is concerned with validation rather than with examination. It offers certificates and diplomas at four levels:

* First: which introduces students to the essential skills and knowledge required in their chosen vocational area;

* National: for junior technicians and administrators;

* Higher National: for senior technicians and administrators; and

* Continuing Education and updating units.

BTEC devises the basic ingredients of courses and the criteria for success, approves the human and material resources in each local centre and validates the courses on offer. Its guiding principles are spelled out in "Policies and Priorities into the 1990s", published in 1984.

Following a brief interregnum, BTEC adopted its present structure, with a governing Council representing industry, commerce, the education service and government departments, appointed in the main by the Department of Education and Science. The Council itself is able to appoint three members who can form a quorum with the Chief Executive/Managing Director in the event of conflict with government appointees.

The Council is serviced by a Finance Committee, an Educational Liaison Committee, and 9 sectoral Boards which devise programmes and validate courses leading to BTEC qualifications, and a series of committees concerned with cross-sector activities including development and review work, learning strategies and Continuing Education.

Through its educational/training programmes BTEC provides a national perspective on the requirements that industry and commerce are likely to make of students entering or returning to employment. Each approved local college or industrial training centre is encouraged to devise modified programmes for its students in line with local employment conditions.

BTEC sees students and employers as its principal customers. Some 500,000 students are currently registered, with about 200,000 joining courses each year (twice as many as enter university - 30% of engineering students undertaking degree courses in polytechnics and colleges come from BTEC courses, and apparently do better than A level entrants).

BTEC produces detailed guidelines about the basic content of programmes including the facilities and type of staff needed and variations which might be appropriate to different locations. Validation panels then consider the proposals submitted by colleges. In making its submission each college must set out details of its administrative arrangements; the structure of the proposed programme; the staff, equipment and other facilities available; and

an explanation of the need and relevance of the programme with supporting evidence from local employers.

BTEC considers that the quality of courses and the quality of student assessment is improved by its encouragement of a team teaching approach (which is meant to supply an element of in-house review) and continuous assessment which places emphasis on applied knowledge through practical assignments. Moderators appointed by BTEC function as external consultants to the team as well as ensuring that the national standards set by BTEC are maintained. Rather than trying to tell teachers how to teach, BTEC prefers to advise them on how students can learn.

BTEC believes that the course team approach which allows a variety of academic disciplines to come together more accurately reflects the work situation where problems are seldom encountered or solved in isolation. Students benefit from the interaction of values and interpretations which such an approach engenders.

While the team teaching approach is meant to supply an element of in-house review and evaluation, BTEC Moderators function as external consultants to the Team as well as acting as the eyes and ears of BTEC and "guardians of national standards".

To receive approval from a Validation Panel, a programme must incorporate sufficient standard units and/or locally-specific variations that cover the basic vocational groundwork required if BTEC qualifications are to be awarded. Courses are re-validated every five years (the current phase began in 1985).

The full range of BTEC programmes has given rise to about 3,000 standard units, with local variations bringing the total actually running to some 12,000. In all about 100,000 modules/units of work have been authorised by BTEC, some of which are common to all or several sectors while others may be specific to one sector, vocational area or local setting.

These units are normally grouped together in batches of 10 (part-time) or 15 (full-time and Diploma courses where no workplace learning element is included) to form a complete programme. Most courses will include at least 8 of the 3,000 standard units, with another 2 elements covering local applications.

Since BTEC qualifications are intended to provide employers with evidence not just that successful students have gained skills and knowledge, but also that they have learned how to apply knowledge to enhance their skills, guidelines provided for teachers running each course outline a system of continuous assessment which places emphasis on applied knowledge through practical assignments.

Courses are designed in units which give greater flexibility (the unit credit approach). Students can build up units to obtain a qualification, and gain exemptions and credits. The units are linked by projects or core studies known as integrative assignments.

After a final assessment on completion of the programme, course team teachers, in consultation with a BTEC Moderator, award successful students a Distinction, Merit or Pass grade on individual units Successful students receive Certificates or Diplomas, and are notified of the individual grades; those who do not achieve a Pass may be Referred (to retake the course), or Failed.

Moderators are part-timers on annual contracts renewable only at BTEC's discretion. They are expected to visit their colleges on a regular basis and to report on the way courses are run, the facilities available and the comments of students and teachers. They are also expected to encourage the development of course teams, to influence teacher involvement in the design of courses and assessment, and to communicate examples of good practice. In the past only 10% of moderators were drawn from industry: currently 20% are from industry and this percentage is likely to increase in the future as greater emphasis is placed on the workplace experience of moderators.

A computerised statistical analysis of student/college results allows BTEC to make comparisons of like with like. This form of monitoring draws attention to discrepancies in results which might indicate that standards in a particular centre may be too lenient or too stringent. A second monitoring system known as the "moderating instrument" involves "batch testing" of groups of students. In March of each year a 20% random sample of centres running mainstream BTEC programmes are sent a short test for students to complete. It may take the form of a multiple choice paper or a simple assignment on work already undertaken. Students are given no warning but are advised that the results will not affect their eventual grades. The analysis of the results takes into account such variables as intake abilities/standards and age differences. These batch results can then be compared with end-of-course results. In line with HMI findings, BTEC has found that each year some 10% of centres appear to produce what may be regarded as "deviant" results. BTEC inspectors then visit to ascertain why such differences may have occurred. In half of these cases there are likely to be acceptable extenuating circumstances. The other half are likely to divide evenly between those where the standards applied have been either too lenient or too stringent. The centres and the relevant moderators are then told the results of both analysis and investigation and are expected to put things right.

Conclusion

From the outlines provided above it is clear that the major national examining and validating bodies relating to further education undertake significant roles in quality control and quality assurance. In the case of CGLI and RSA, they define the specification and closely control testing. BTEC, on the other hand, delegates these tasks to the college but provides detailed guidelines and monitors the outcomes (including teaching strategies) through its validation and moderation procedures and processes. In all three cases there is a concern to consult with, and to involve employers so as to ensure "fitness for purpose". Whilst all this does not absolve colleges from developing and implementing their own quality control/quality assurance procedures, it does have implications for where they should place their emphasis and priorities.

Section 5

A "BROAD BRUSH" AUDIT OF EXISTING PRACTICE

Access was negotiated with six colleges (two in Wales, four in England) in order to explore the "state of the art" in quality assurance. Whilst this small sample could in no way be described as "representative", the colleges were chosen so as to provide a reasonable coverage with regard to size, mix of work and urban/rural location. They were also identified as being concerned with, and committed to, the development of quality assurance. A summary of the basic characteristics of each college is provided in Appendix C.

The Audit

A college actively engaged in quality assurance would aim to establish for each of its courses:

* a "specification" which identified, inter alia, performance criteria;
* the mechanisms and instruments for collecting and analysing data on both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions illustrated in Figure 1 - page 8; and
* systematic procedures and processes for evaluating and reviewing this data and for ensuring that the messages were fed back and acted upon.

In addition the college would be concerned to motivate all its staff - academic, administration and technician - in pursuit of quality in their work.

How far were the participating colleges in meeting these aims? It was not possible within the time and resource constraints of this project to establish the position for each course in each college. It was possible, however, to interview "key personnel" and to supplement their responses by reference to readily available documentation and statistics. This enabled a broad statement to be made about the state of the art in each college.

As a result the following picture has emerged.

* All the colleges are now systematically collecting data on "enrolments", "completions" and "successes". This enables the computation of the retention and success rates required by the Joint Efficiency Study (JES). Only two of the colleges claimed to have this data readily available going back three years. In only one of the colleges is the data being currently maintained centrally: in the remainder it is variously located but primarily at the department level.

* Data on target enrolments is available in only half of the colleges and data on "destinations" is even more rare. Consequently it is not possible at the moment to compute the ratios enrolments/target enrolments, and "progressions" and "completions" in all cases.

* Three of the colleges have acquired, and are now using, hardware and software capable of maintaining a continuous record of individual student's achievements and progress, and of generating all the effectiveness measures required by the JES. The remaining colleges are planning to acquire and to implement such a computerised record.

* Two of the colleges are now engaged in formal target setting with their LEAs. A further college is implementing formal internal agreements and the rest claim to have informal internal arrangements.

* Two of the colleges are regularly and systematically canvassing student opinions and employer feedback on their provision. Some course tutors and course teams undertake these surveys in the other colleges but the practice is not widespread nor is it regular.

* The arrangements made for reviewing course performance vary. In one case the process and the procedures are well documented, the information to be collected and considered is defined, and the review team includes evaluators drawn from outside the course team. In many cases, however, the process seems to be prompted by the Head of Department and/or course tutor who decides if, when how and who should be involved. These comments of course do not apply to whatever arrangements for evaluation and review are made within the colleges to satisfy the requirements of the national examining and validating bodies.

From the brief account above it is clear that there is considerable scope for improving the management of quality. The first priority must be for all the colleges to work towards a full implementation of the Joint Efficiency Study. This involves all colleges:-

* "operating comprehensive, integrated, computerised management systems able to cater for the performance indicators identified in our report" (Para 6.8i Managing Colleges Efficiently)

* negotiating externally with their LEAs and internally to set targets for all the performance indicators;

* undertaking a systematic annual review of performance; and

* surveying student and employer opinions on a regular basis.

"VALIDATION, REVIEW AND MONITORING" AT COLLEGE C (GlosCAT)

Given the limitations of the "broad brush" audit it would be misleading to attempt to compare and to rank the participating colleges with regard to their existing practice. However, it is useful at this stage to describe in some detail what was the best documented system of course review encountered.

In the early eighties GlosCAT initiated a system of quality assurance known as "validation, monitoring and review" (VMR). Initially these procedures and processes were applied to the degree and other AFE work. More recently the knowledge and experience gained has been extended to the NAFE courses. The definitions of VMR and other related terms used by GlosCAT are set out in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5

VALIDATING, MONITORING AND REVIEW

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

QUALITY ASSURANCE - The generic name given to the processes of validation, review and monitoring, which constitute the system whereby an institution checks and maintains the academic standards of its courses.

VALIDATION - The process whereby a new or significantly revised course proposal is examined, either within an institution to assess its suitability for inclusion in that institution's programme, or by a validating body outside the institution to assess its suitability for carrying the approval of that body.

REVIEW - The periodic investigation by either the institution internally or an external validating body, to ascertain whether the course is achieving its stated aims and objectives, and whether it is being correctly monitored and evaluated by the course team.

MONITORING - The overseeing of the evaluation of a course, carried out by representatives ultimately accountable to an institution's Academic Board, identifying problem areas and checking on action taken in response to conditions and recommendations made at validation/review.

EVALUATION - The continuous process of course assessment, carried out by the course team. Activities will include collection and analysis of data, appraisal of recent performance of the course, identification of problem areas and reporting on action taken in response to problems.

CRITICAL APPRAISAL - The evaluation by the course team of a course's performance over a period of years, using the results of monitoring and evaluation: also a justification of future plans based on past performance and reasoned expectations.

The Internal Validation Committee consists of some twelve members although membership is recommended to the Academic Board by the Academic Standards Committee. For the validation of particular courses, Internal Validation Panels are established. The Chairman is drawn from the Internal Validation Committee and other members of a Panel are drawn from a list of Panel members (approved by the Academic Board) who have signified their willingness to serve as occasion requires. The internal members of a Panel are supplemented, where appropriate, by specialists from inside and outside the college. A report, written by the Chairman of the Panel, is copied to the Academic Planning and Resources Committee following each internal validation exercise and any problems encountered are dealt with either directly by the Academic Standards Committee, by the Academic Planning and Resources Committee or, if necessary, by the Academic Board.

A NAFE course validation takes approximately 3 to 4 hours in panel session, during which time the members will be looking for evidence that :-

* the course team has worked together in compiling the submission;
* adequate procedures for review and evaluation exist;
* the team has had across department consultations;
* appropriate consultations with industry and market research have been performed;
* teaching/learning/assessment strategies are sound; and
* resources issues have been fully investigated.

Membership of the Internal Validation Committee and the Internal Validation Panels is changed in part, annually, in order that a wide range of college staff may gain experience of validation as part of their personal staff development.

Team members may operate as individuals or as a team at the discretion of the chairperson and the Head of Department concerned. Whilst members may approach staff and students concerned with the course, it is required that such approaches must have the prior approval of the Head of Department.

The Monitoring approach is, thematic and concentrates on a selection from such issues as:-

* course establishment - market research, curriculum development, staff development, role identification etc.
* course management - teaching/learning strategies, student counselling and guidance, work placement administration, etc.

* assessment - in course and end of session, student success rate analysis, external examiners reports, review of aims and objectives, etc.

* liaison - with schools, employers and the relevance to student careers, etc.

* student - support services, accommodation, welfare etc.

The programme is varied annually so that all the above issues are covered over a period of time.

The terms of reference for a monitoring team are:

* to agree with the Head of Department and appropriate Heads of School and to report to the Academic Review Officer an annual programme of monitoring based on themes;

* to participate in an agreed programme of monitoring in cooperation with Course Management Teams and the Academic Review Officer;

* to receive and comment upon course evaluation undertaken by Course Management Teams;

* to prepare an annual report for the Academic Standards Committee based on the monitoring programme; and

* to assist Course Management Teams in preparing an overall review of courses on a 3-5 year cycle.

The VMR process has a number of features which are worthy of note:

(i) ".....although comprising a number of constituent activities each of which has its own integrity.....validation, monitoring and review is a unitary process in which all the activities are linked and mutually reinforcing". (College Policy Statement 1987/88

(ii) The process makes heavy demands on academic staff time. For the first two terms of the 1987/88 financial year the total staff hours allocated to monitoring teams and internal validation was 1368 at an approximate academic staff cost of £20,000 (£7,000 for AFE courses).

(iii) There is a positive spin off in staff development. Typical comment from those who have been involved in the process are:

"..it gave me a greater insight into the work and teaching strategies of other departments";

"participation has helped me to improve my aural skills";

"it has developed a critical self analysis of my own courses" ;

"it has taught me that there is no one best way for all learning processes".

(iv) the process is linked with staff development. For example, GRIST monies have been used to train members of validation panels, monitoring and course teams in curriculum design and development.

(v) The college management information systems are being geared to support the process with appropriate data "completion" and "success" rates etc.; and guidelines/action checklist are available for validating panels, monitoring teams and course teams. (See Figure 6 - page 38 for example).

(vi) The processes and procedures of VMR are kept under review and are continuously evolving.

Since this report was written, the college has reviewed the system of monitoring and has made some changes to the process which it carries out, so the above statement is no longer fully descriptive of the college's process.

FIGURE 6

ANNUAL COURSE EVALUATION REPORT : Checklist for Course Team

Course
School
Course Leader

Demand

Enquiries
Applications
Enrolments (compared with agreed targets)

Effectiveness

Completions (" " ")
Withdrawals (" " ")
Qualification success (" " ")
Destinations (" " ")
Other student successes

External Evaluation

Validation Panel Report
Moderator/Examiners Report
Student satisfaction/feedback
Employer satisfaction/feedback

Development

Curriculum Development: course aims and objectives
course structure
assessment
teaching/learning methods

Staff Development

Resources

Staff
Physical

Matters of good practice or congratulation
Matters of concern
Other comments
Action taken, proposed or recommended by Course Team
Course changes proposed or recommended by Course Team
Matters referred forward to course review/re-validation not covered above.

Section 6

THE SURVEY OF EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

The Aims of the Survey

The purpose of the enquiry was to describe the commitment of employers to their training programmes and to determine if any differences in the level of commitment were due to the number of employees, the type of business, a general attitude, the location of the training programmes, or the satisfaction with the control exercised by employers over the training provided by colleges.

The Method

The sample was drawn from the catchment areas of the six participating colleges. Five of the colleges selected ten employers and one college selected eight employers. In each case the sample of employers selected by the college included employers who had little or no contact with the college e.g. no employees who were students of the college. All fifty-eight employers were interviewed by one of three members of the project team. The total of fifty-eight companies employed about 65,000 workers and ranged in size from one employee to 14,000 employees.

The interviews followed a structured format. The first set of questions were directed toward the general attitude of the person being interviewed and responses were coded as optimistic, hopeful, doubtful, or pessimistic. The intent of the question was to see if the views on training were a part of a general view or if the views on training were unique. A second set of questions dealt with the aim of the training programme, the aim of any further education training within that programme, the training policy which guided the programme, and the extent of the training programme. This second set of questions provided a measure of the commitment to training by the employer and formed the dependent variable of this survey. The level of commitment was coded as enthusiastic/aggressive, positive/active, reserved/passive and negative/preventative. The intent of these questions was to characterise the commitment so that the independent variables could be related to that commitment. A final set of questions had to do with the satisfaction the employers felt toward the control they were able to exercise over the training provided by colleges. These levels of satisfaction were coded as satisfied with the control, desired more control, desired less control and had no interest in control. The purpose of this set of questions was to elicit any comments about the training provided by the college as viewed from the employers' perspective.

The interviews were conducted in the company offices with the individual designated by the company as having responsibility for training. In most cases these were people who had a proportion of their time assigned to responsibility for training. In several cases the training directors were full-time and in a few instances, particularly in small companies, the chief executive of the company was responsible for training. This limits the results, since only the view of one person within each company regarding the corporate view of training is represented. Nevertheless, most of the interviews were conducted with those individuals who had the most experience with training and who could best express the company training policy.

Finally, it should be noted that the personal interview method is a relatively expensive way to collect data. A conservative cost estimate for each interview was £75. The advantages over a less costly mail questionnaire method were (1) the ability to adapt the interview to the situation found at each company, (2) a 100% return rate and (3) the ability to probe any unexpected responses in greater depth.

The Results of the Study

Figure 7 presents the results of the interviews. The columns represent the average rating of the dependent variable of level of commitment, while the rows represent the independent variables of the catchment area, the interviewer, the number of employees, the type of business, the general attitude, the location of the training and the degree of satisfaction with the level of control.

FIGURE 7

Responses of 58 employers in England and Wales who were selected by six further education colleges as representative of employers in their service areas in the Spring of 1988.

Level of Commitment

Sources of Differences in Responses	Enthusiastic/ Aggressive (N=15)	Positive/ Active (N=12)	Reserved/ Passive (N=16)	Negative/ Preventative (N=15)
	Rating Scale			
	1.0 1.5	2.0 2.5	3.0 3.5	4.0
College Catchment				
College 1 (N=10)		2.2		
College 2 (N=10)		2.2		
College 3 (N=10)		1.9		
College 4 (N=10)			2.6	
College 5 (N=10)		2.2		
College 6 (N= 8)		2.2		
Interviewers				
Person 1 (N=20)		2.2		
Person 2 (N=20)		2.2		
Person 3 (N=18)		2.2		
No. of Employees				
Over 1000 (N=14)	1.6			
200 - 999 (N=15)		2.1		
75 - 199 (N=15)			2.8	
Under 75 (N=14)			3.3	
Type of Employer				
Admin. (N=24)		2.3		
Service (N=17)		2.5		
Const. (N=17)			2.8	
General Attitude				
Optimist (N=15)	1.7			
Hopeful (N=21)		2.3		
Doubtful (N=17)		2.6		
Pessimist (N= 5)		2.5		
Location				
Mixed (N=31)		2.2		
Internal (N=14)			2.9	
External (N=10)			3.1	
None (N= 3)				4.0
Control				
Satisfied (N=34)		1.9		
More (N=13)			2.7	
Less (N= 6)				3.6
No Inter. (N= 9)				3.6

As can be seen from Figure 7 (page 40) the differences in commitment to training did not seem to be related to the catchment area selected or to the individual doing the interviewing. There was, however, a difference in level of commitment to training based upon the size of the company as measured by number of employees. Those companies with the most employees tended to have a more positive and aggressive commitment to training. This commitment did not seem to be much affected by the type of business and seemed to be most positive when the person being interviewed expressed an optimistic attitude, when the training was conducted in a mixture of on-site and off-site locations, and when there was a general satisfaction with the level of control over the training provided by FE.

Employers of students released to part time day courses tended to be more positive about influencing the college and its staff, especially at Head of Department and course tutor levels. They were capable of being more critical, but also more satisfied when they felt their expectations had been met.

There was better contact between employer and the college when the courses provided were seen as an integral part of selection training and development schemes accepted and institutionalised within the system. Examples are courses for local government, hospital services and administration, and engineering and construction when related to earlier-established apprenticeship schemes. In respect of these latter, the EITB and CITB have a significant role in quality evaluation.

Where employers were releasing part time students to, or employing students from full time courses from more than one college, they were able to make comparisons between their standards of teaching, and between the levels of student performance. In one or two cases employers were critical of BTEC's control of standards.

In addition to this information from the structured interview, the interviewers recorded some comments made by employers which helped to interpret the responses. A sample of these comments is presented below to reflect their range and character.

Some were positive about further education.

* Generally further education is doing a good job.
* The college gives good value for money.
* If we have any complaints the college responds quickly

Some were neutral or negative about further education.

* I can award no brickbats or accolades.
* Students at the further education college are not stretched enough.

* The part-time training is better than the full-time training.

* More flexible training is needed.

* Learning problems need to be identified earlier.

* Further education has an open animosity toward crafts.

* Personal appearance is critical to retailing but is not reflected by the dress of teachers in further education.

* People in industry remain unconvinced of the value of training as provided in further education.

* By further education I assume you mean English and sums.

Finally, there were some useful insights into quality assurance.

* Quality assurance is about people not things.

* Quality assurance is an inexact science like medicine 40 years ago.

* Quality assurance has much philosophy but little sound technique.

* Quality control has some sound statistical techniques.

* Quality assurance assures paper work but not necessarily the product.

Summary

The purpose of this part of the project was to explore the commitment of employers to training and their expectations and perceptions of further education. Fifty-eight employers were interviewed by a member of the project team using a structured format. Those companies with the most employees tended to have a more positive and aggressive commitment to training. This commitment did not seem to be much affected by the type of business and seemed to be most positive when the person being interviewed expressed an optimistic attitude, when the training was a mixture of on-site and off-site locations, and when there was a general satisfaction with opportunities available to the employer to influence the college.

By and large the smaller the employer the more dissatisfied they were with FE. However, these same employers were often ill informed about the learning opportunities being offered and unsure about how to bring their influence to bear. It would seem that in some cases colleges are failing to effectively market their products and to involve the small employer. On the other hand, in a few cases there was some doubt about the commitment of the small employer to training whether provided off site (by colleges or others) or provided by themselves.

Section 7

RECAP AND CONCLUSIONS

The expected outcomes from this study were a greater appreciation of the components, dimensions and measurement of quality; and a better understanding of what needs to be done to improve quality assurance in NAFE. The first stage has involved:

* a review of other relevant work;
* an assessment of the roles of HMI and the RFEA;
* an examination of the influence of three examining and validating bodies - CGLI, RSA and BTEC;
* a "broad brush" audit of existing practices in in six colleges; and
* an evaluation of the expectations and perceptions of a sample of employers.

The definition of "quality" adopted is that provided in the British Standards Institution (BSI) Handbook 22 (1987) i.e.

> "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs".

Hence the term is not used to express a degree of excellence in a comparative sense, nor is it used in a quantitative sense for technical evaluations, but in a "fitness for purpose" sense.

"Quality control" involves all these techniques and activities aimed both at monitoring a process and at eliminating causes of unsatisfactory performance at all the relevant stages from the identification of needs through to the assessment of whether these needs have been met. As such "quality control" is a subset of "quality assurance" which is defined by the BSI as "all those planned and systematic actions necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality". Thus all activities and all functions in any undertaking and all personnel engaged in them are concerned with the attainment of quality and are inherently involved in quality assurance.

In an attempt to provide a framework for quality control in NAFE a "measurement matrix" was produced (Figure 1 page 8). This matrix assumed that the products of a college are its courses or programmes of study but in assessing the impact of the provision note has to be taken of individual student (client) responses. For a complete statement about quality two sets of

measures are required: "quantitative" and "qualitative". The quantitative measures include the "effectiveness" indicators recommended by the Joint Efficiency Study. They also include the pre-course/selection tests, phase tests and summative tests. Ideally these instruments should reveal whether "needs" as identified in the specification are being met. In some cases the instruments will have been constructed by external examining boards. The qualitative measures include value and attitude surveys intended to assess levels of satisfaction with the process by students and employers. Measurements may be taken at entry, during the course, at exit and post course. Where available, the comments and recommendations of external examiners and moderators and HMI would also need to be taken into account. These measurements and evaluations need to be fed into a regular and systematic course monitoring and review process.

A control system involves:

* identifying the key variables to be monitored;

* setting a "target" or "standard" or "satisfactory" level of performance for these variables;

* developing and implementing a system for collecting analysing and reporting on the key variables; and

* having a clear view of what action should follow if the performance falls below the "target" or "standard" or "satisfactory" level.

Thus control facilitates "management by exception" i.e. it focuses attention on those outcomes which are "not OK" when compared with the original expections. In so doing it stimulates remedial action - but after the event. Ideally a control system should alert the organisation to the need for change before, rather than after, the event since "prevention is better than a cure". In other words the ideal control system would be a "feed forward" rather than a "feedback" system. This may be possible in some cases.

For example, consider a college which wishes to minimise its "withdrawal" rates. The calculation of the rates at the end of the year will enable the college to compare its performance with others and so identify the size and the incidence of the problems - if any. This may well prompt more investment in student selection, initial guidance and subsequent counselling next year. It may also help the college to channel its staff development where it is most needed. The ideal control system, however, would have identified potential problems and would have set in train the changes required to minimise the impact of student dissatisfaction before the students voted with their feet. For example, the regular (weekly) monitoring of attendance and of the submission of assignments might well have prompted further investigation of student opinions and, hence, timely remedial action.

In a college dedicated to improving quality the firt appraisal of the aims, feasibility and resource base of a new or revised course should take place before it is launched. This process is usually called "validation" to distinguish it from subsequent course monitoring and course evaluation. It is an example of "feed forward" control. This process should :

* include an analysis of the market to prove need and demand;

* demonstrate how these needs and demand will be met;

* ensure that the proposals satisfy relevant educational/ training criteria;

* specify the resource and organisational implications; and

* identify the criteria of success.

A critical element in quality assurance is the "specification" i.e. "the document that prescribes the requirements with which the product or service has to conform (BSI 1987). The more detailed and exact the specification the more likely it will be that the course and the students' responses will meet the end requirements. It is the specification or "needs analysis" (FEU) 1984 that prompts the curriculum processes - design, implementation, review and evaluation. The validation process leads to or underwrites the specification.

The end (or exit) requirements for many courses are the entry requirements for higher education or for employment. This being so higher education and employers should play a part in drawing up the specification. Often they do but indirectly through the central examining and validating bodies. By and large in our sample of employers the larger the company the more satisfied they were with this state of affairs. Nevertheless there was some evidence of dissatisfaction with FE in our sample of employers and not only among the small employers. Colleges need to invest more in marketing their products. They might also benefit from trying to involve the employers more through, for example, advisory committes. They should aim to incorporate more specifically into the course specifications the course outcomes that employers require.

The central bodies vary in styles and in their relationship with colleges and, hence, in the way they impact upon the specification and the subsequent processes of design, implementation, review and evaluation. For example, the CGLI and the RSA in many of their courses, tend to exercise firm control over the syllabus and examination but intervene little elsewhere. BTEC, on the other hand, allows the college more initiative in syllabus and examinations but attempts to influence the style and modes of delivery through its validation and the standard of outcomes in terms of student performance through its moderating processes.

HMI, the RFEA and the TSAS all play a part in quality assurance. HMI and the TSIs are far more active than the RFEA in monitoring the quality of classroom activities and in assessing comparative standards of student achievement. This contact with the "chalk face" is strongest in the context of formal inspections: between inspections the contact tends to be intermittent. HMI, the RFEA and the TSAS are concerned to impact upon the college at a higher level of aggregation. It is here that they may hope to bring influence to bear upon corporate quality policy and the management of quality.

Althougn HMI, the RFEA, the TSAS and the central examining and moderating bodies all play important parts, the major responsibility for quality assurance resides with the college. All of the six participating colleges expressed a strong commitment to maintaining and improving the quality of their provision. All of them had made some progress towards implementing the recommendations of the Joint Efficiency Study with regard to effectiveness indicators. Data on "target enrolments" was available in only two of the colleges, however, and data on "destinations" was even more scarce. The majority of courses across the sample were not regularly and systematically canvassing student and employer opinions nor were they engaged in formal "target setting". In one college the procedures and processes for course validation, review and evaluation were well documented and well established. The practice in the other colleges varied and sometimes seemed to be dependent upon the initiative of the course tutor and/or head of department.

A primary concern of any organisation must be the quality of its products or services. To be successful a college must offer courses or programmes of study which meet well defined needs; satisfy clients' expectations; and comply with applicable standards and educational criteria. It must also achieve these "quality" objectives at an acceptable cost. Management is ultimately responsible for establishing the policy and for developing, implementing and maintaining the systems which assure quality. The college and its clients need to be confident of the quality of the system and of the quality of its courses. This requires documented evidence. It also requires the strongest commitment on the part of top management to ensure not only that appropriate procedures and processes are established, but also that the messages gleaned from monitoring and review are acted upon.

THE NEXT STAGE

Stage 1 of this project has established that there is some scope for improving the management of quality. A set of general "principles" covering the management of quality assurance has already been published by the British Standards Institution in its handbook Quality Assurance (1987). Should the Training Agency fund a second stage the intention is to work with the BSI and the participating colleges to establish how far these "principles" are applicable to education and training. The expected outcomes are:

* the extension and refinement of the frameworks developed in Stage 1 leading to the specification of a set of "principles" for quality assurance in education and training which is endorsed by the BSI; and

* the testing and validation of new improved systems for quality assurance in the participating colleges based on the "principles" as they are agreed.

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OTHER PROJECTS FUNDED BY FURTHER EDUCATION BRANCH OF TRAINING AGENCY WHICH ARE CONCERNED WITH IMPROVING QUALITY IN FURTHER EDUCATION

1. Title: Evaluation Strategies in NAFE

   Contractor: Avon LEA

   Dates: 2 years - due to finish August 1989

   Aims and Objectives: In the first year the project developed the QAV (quality, accessibility, validity) model of evaluation, together with a scheme for monitoring and evaluation based upon the use of a Course Review Profile - an instrument designed to record and collate information about a course in such a way that evaluation is made easier.

   In the second year this will be used in a variety of courses and services to field test it. The monitoring and evaluation scheme is also seen as a central feature of the NAFE review and planning process at both college and county level and will be used in relation to this. The scheme's impact on team and individual development will also be examined.

   Contact: Mr John Tayler, County of Avon FE Staff Development Unit, Stile Acres, Lawrence Weston, Bristol BS11 1QA.

2. Title: Towards an Educational Audit

   Contractor: Bedfordshire and Devon LEAs

   Dates: The project ran for one year until the summer of 1988.

   Aims and Objectives: To establish criteria to enable institutions to develop indicators, both qualitative and quantitative against which effectiveness can be judged.

   To evaluate the usefulness of these criteria to college managers in a context of planning the delivery of the curriculum to make use of available resources.

   Contact: Mr Fintan Donohue, The Education Department, County Hall, Bedford MK42 9AP.

3. Title: Quality Control - Implementing a framework for monitoring and evaluation through action learning and staff development

Contractor: Birmingham LEA

Dates: One year from September 1988

Aims and Objectives: This project builds on work already undertaken in the LEA.

The project aims to develop a transferrable framework for monitoring and evaluation implemented through staff development.

Contact: Mrs Elizabeth Whale, Birmingham City Council Education Department, Continuing Education Division, 1 Duchess Place, Hagley Road, Birmingham B16 8ND.

College A. (Carmarthenshire College of Technology and Art)

Carmarthenshire College of Technology and Art was formed in 1985 by the merger of the previously separate Technical Colleges at Llanelli, Carmarthen and Ammanford, together with the Dyfed College of Art at Carmarthen and the Agricultural College at Gelli Aur, Llandeilo. The merger enables course and resource rationalisation programmes to take place on five campuses with each campus providing the main administrative base for up to three Faculties, from a total of eight. Some subject/disciplines are offered on a multi-campus basis, usually responding to a community need. Each campus is developing a learning resource facility, encouraging utilisation by students following full-time, part-time and continuing education (Access) provision. The concentration of resources has allowed a substantial investment in new technology as dedicated (CAD/CAM etc) or general facilities.

The County of Dyfed is predominantly rural, however, CCTA is located on the eastern side and thus serves an interested infrastructure of rural (Carmarthen/Llandeilo), urban (Llanelli) and mixed (Ammanford) economies. The College serves the NAFE needs of east Dyfed, selected County-wide courses at NAFE and 98% of AFE based in the County.

The newly merged organisation has led to a greatly increased analysis of local and County-wide employment needs and as a result, new course developments at both NAFE and AFE span vocational programmes from post-16 to HND provision. It is also worthy to note a widening range of entrepreneurial activities including product development, local collaborative projects, and a Training Managership administered through an Innovation Resource Centre, with its own Director.

Innovative developments have resulted in new College-wide systems in course planning, pre-validating, validating and review, as well as resourcing for IT and other new technology application areas. The College has been particularly active in utilising industrial/employer associates and other agencies including the Training Agency, the Dyfed County Economic Development Unit, the County Planning Department and the Welsh Development Agency (Wintech) in course marketing, design and development.

Faculties are accountable to the Principal and the Academic Board which functions through four major sub-committees, Academic Planning, Resources, Course Appraisal and Staff Development, and Student Affairs. These are assisted by specific Working Groups. The Academic Committee plays a strategic role in the responsiveness of the College, the Resource Committee a role in reviewing, controlling and managing the utilisation and effectiveness of support services. The Course Appraisal and Staff Development Committee has established a rigorous approach to such matters as the effectiveness of course validating, course organisation and review and evaluation. The system flows from a formal preparation of course evaluation proforma, at Course Team level through to Faculty Boards, Course Appraisal and Staff Development Committee and finally to Academic Board. Every year a range of courses are chosen for a detailed analysis, the process can and does utilise external consultants/employers. The Student Affairs Committee has a brief to develop all support services and recommendations to facilitate policies associated with Health, Pastoral Care, Welfare, Sports etc.

The College marketing strategy has taken cognizance of client needs, using its powerful involvement of industrial and other employers, career services etc, in creating current and projected courses and provision for developing new learning processes. The College has collaborated well under the County-wide Responsive College Programme.

College B (Colchester Institute)

The Colchester Institute was formed in September 1976 as a result of the amalgamation of the North-East Essex Technical College and School of Art at Colchester and St.Osyth's College at Clacton-on-Sea. In addition to these two main sites the Institute also operates on two annexes in Colchester. Shortly after merger teacher education provision ceased and the resources have been redeveloped to meet the needs of more general AFE and NAFE courses. The Institute is large, having approximately 7000 students (3500 FTE, 17% AFE, and 83% NAFE). The college employs approximately 330 fte teachers and operated in 1986/87 at an SSR of approximately 10.6.

Colchester is the natural commercial and industrial centre for both North East Essex and parts of South East Suffolk and the Institute's catchment area is reflected in the wide spread of its recruitment to non-advanced further education courses. The Institute aims to respond flexibly to demands from Employers, Managing Agents and individual students for study programmes using the most appropriate pattern of attendance, including the open-learning mode. The wide range of provision over many disciplines and at many levels will be maintained and developed as resources allow. The Institute is keenly aware that North East Essex is within commuting distance of London and that it must take into account the job opportunities available there when planning its programme of courses.

The Institute recognises the specialist nature of many of its courses some of which are co-ordinated through the Regional Advisory Council as a part of a broader provision to meet the needs of the East Anglian Region. The commitment to these courses will continue and the Institute will endeavour to maintain and develop this contribution to regional development. Priority will be given to participation in national initiatives aimed at enhancing industrial awareness to the challenge of new technology and of the need to keep up to date in all occupational areas.

In order to strengthen the course axis within the Institute's matrix structure and to emphasise the importance of responding to and satisfying client needs, a recent restructuring has involved the identification of seven senior management posts of Deans of Study, viz:

Art, Design and Music
Business and Catering Studies
Continuing Education
General Education
Social and Community Studies
Technology
Youth Training Schemes

The Deans have responsibility for the development and operation of courses and the students attending the courses and are assisted by Course Tutors and, where appropriate, Personal Tutors.

The Teaching Staff are organised into fourteen Schools, each led by a Head of School who has responsibility for the maintenance and development of a group of academic subjects, the teaching staff involved with the subjects and any specialist resources and equipment within the subject area.

College C (Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology)

The College was formed on September 1st 1981 as a result of the merger of North Gloucestershire College of Technology, Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, and Gloucester City College of Technology, together with the physical resources of the former Gloucestershire College of Education at Oxstalls Lane Gloucester. The latter institute was closed for teacher education in 1980. These four colleges gave GlosCAT two main campuses in each of the county centres of population - Cheltenham and Gloucester.

GlosCAT is a very large group 11 college with approximately 5478 fte students (67% NAFE; 33% AFE). It employs about 552 fte teachers and operated in 1986/87 at an SSR of approximately 9.9.

Gloucestershire may be divided into three areas: Severn Vale, The Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean. Severn Vale with Cheltenham population (86,000) and Gloucester (population 91,000) has more than a third of the total county population of 509,000. These towns provide more than half of the 218,000 jobs available in the county. The Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean have shown a decline in their traditional employment sectors of forestry, agriculture and mining. This decline has resulted in a nett shortfall of jobs to those seeking employment. To compensate, there is a major commuting flow to the Severn Vale. In recent years Gloucestershire has been able to create sufficient job opportunities to provide for its resident population. From 1951 to 1981 the growth was twice the national rate. It is estimated that 1,000 people find work outside the county, mainly in Avon and Oxfordshire.

In September 1981,a basic reorganisation had to be achieved within the new college. Those departments which were duplicated were merged and, in one or two cases, related areas of provision were aggregated to form new departments. This resulted in 15 departments, some of which were very larg having some 60-70 full-time teaching staff and offering a wide range of courses. In contrast, some departments offered only one degree course and had very few full-time staff. A completely revised academic structure was implemented three years later in September 1984 which comprises a vertical structure of seven Grade 6 Departments each incorporating several Schools which contain groupings of related courses. There is also a horizontal structure with a number of Programme Areas covering such provision as Library and Learning Resources, Youth Training, Staff Development etc which are the concern of virtually all Departments. Within the organisation, Heads of Department have a mainly resource management role, Heads of School have a mainly academic leadership role and Programme Area Directors have a coordinating and developmental role.

College D: (Milton Keynes College)

Formed in 1982 from the former Bletchley College of Further Education and the Wolverton College of Further Education the College is situated on three sites which geographically roughly form a triangle of Wolverton in the north, Bletchley in the south and Chaffron Way which is close to central Milton Keynes.

For the next five years Buckinghamshire is expected to be the fastest growing county in the U.K. The growth of population will be highest in the North of the county. Following national trends, employment has declined in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction while service industries such as Distribution,Catering, Transport and Commerce have grown. However, evidence of skill shortages in the former declining industrial areas are now apparent.

As approximately 1 in 4 of the 16 - 19 age band undertake some form of education in colleges and 1 in 5 enrol on an examinable vocational course, the forecast for NAFE courses in the county is that the demand will remain strong and continuing. Milton Keynes is the fastest growing urban population in the U.K. The city has a relatively young population. Growth of some 6% in the three year period 1989 - 1992 is forecasted. From 1984 - 1985 the number of jobs increased by 4,026, from 53,630 to 57,656. Most employers have small size workforces, 80% employ less than 20 people, 67% less than 10 people, whilst only two employ over 1,000. The ratio of male to female workers is 60:40 compared with the national average of 56:44.

In 1987/88 there were about 5,000 enrolments (1600 ftes: 95% NAFE; 5% AFE). The college employed about 123 fte teachers and operated at an SSR of about 1:12.

The College was originally composed of four departments - Business and Management Studies; Engineering; General Education and Science; and Catering, Care and Community Services. As from this year (1988) the College was restructured on a non-departmental basis. The work of the College is now divided into twelve main course areas each of which is under the direction of a Curriculum Manager, the latter report to a cross site Assistant Director who carries college wide responsibility for curriculum planning and development. Each of the three sites is under the direction of a Site Manager who carries responsibility for site management and resource development. The Site Managers report to the Deputy Director who has overall responsibility for all sites. The sites are linked together through a number of cross site roles and activities which ensure that the college has a unity and an overall corporate sense of direction.

College E (Newport College of Further Education)

The college was established in the early 1960's at a time when the two former authorities of Monmouthshire County Council and Newport Borough Council were jointly reorganising their AFE and NAFE provision.

In the late 1960's, a new college was built on a single campus on the eastern outskirts of the town. The buildings have since been extended, by both permanent and temporary (hutted) accommodation, to cope, albeit minimally, with expansion of its provision in response to increases in demand, and the college remains essentially a single-campus institution. There are, however, two annexes operating in the town. Although there is no definitive statement of the college's catchment area by the LEA, the college serves the town and the S Eastern area of the county, an area which has seen some industrial development associated with the Severn Bridge and the M4.

The college is of moderate size with some 3,900 enrolments (1771 fte students: wholly NAFE). In 1986/87 the college employed about 162 fte teachers and operated at an SSR of 10.9.

The college is conventionally organised into four departments - Building: Business Studies; Engineering; Science and Vocational Subjects. Each department is largely responsible for its own curriculum development, resources and, to a lesser extent, staff development; although there is increasing evidence of college or LEA initiated intervention in all areas. Heads of Department are responsible to the Principal, Vice Principal and the Academic Board. Each head is also responsible for the internal organisation of his department.

In addition to a wide-ranging portfolio of vocational courses, the college offers full-time, part-time day and evening-only GCSE and GCE A level courses or programmes in two departments; administration and co-ordination is the responsibility of the department (Science & Vocational Subjects) which is the more involved. Evening class enrolments are in single subjects. Youth Training Scheme (YTS) provision consists of specific groups within each department. Pre-vocational course provision consists of CPVE and RSA/CGLI Foundation Courses (14-16) co-ordinated by a member of staff with cross-departmental responsibility. Both CPVE and Foundation Course (14-16) activity involve links with pupils from secondary schools associated with the college.

Each of the 100 or so courses is supervised by a course tutor from the full-time staff of the department concerned. There is some variation between (and within) the departments in the specification and perception of their roles, duties and functions, but all are seen as having some function in course administration, examinations, review and control of students' progress and record keeping. Many are required to maintain contacts with employers for course design, marketing, and work experience placement purposes. There appears to have been little by way of the evaluation of resource utilisation nor is there any coordinated approach to course marketing in the past. The recent adoption of a college-wide policy and the identification of a small team to assume particular responsibility for marketing should lead to a more co-ordinated approach to contact with employers, schools and other agencies in the future.

College F: (Portsmouth College of Art, Design and Further Education.

Portsmouth College is located in the centre of the city near the Guildhall.

The college offers its services in support of the City of Portsmouth, the "Travel to Work Area" (Portsmouth, Fareham, Gosport, Havant and Petersfield) and further afield for particular specialisms.

For the City of Portsmouth there are link courses with the secondary schools, staff development programmes for teachers, transitional studies, with a major in Design for 16 plus school leavers, Work Related-Non Advanced Further Education, support for small businesses in association with other agencies, specialist projects and an arts network.

Portsmouth College provides a lead across the county of Hampshire for design education at NAFE.

The pre-degree foundation course in Art and Design recruits students through a Hampshire clearing house. Applicants come from far and wide across the county and also from the Isle of Wight.

The College, in conjunction with the Faculty of Environmental Design at Portsmouth Polytechnic, (known as Portsmouth Principle Centre), offers a range of higher level courses for which there is a national and international catchment for Advanced Education in Design. The Higher National Diploma programmes attract applications from across the British Isles and increasingly from other countries.

In 1986/87 there were some 1000 fte students and 97 fte academic staff (i.e. an SSR of 10.3). The students are enrolled on a range of courses primarily in art and design and business studies.

During the 1986/87 session the college was reorganised. The college is now organised into a "network" of inter-related sections rather than conventional departments. The inter-related sections form into project and Course Teams. Each of these has a 'Course Team Leader'. Course Team Leaders chair Course Team meetings which report to standing committees of the Academic Board. The Principal chairs the Academic Board. Working across the College network, senior managers, known as directors have cross-functional responsibilities and report directly to the Principalship. These directors form the basis of a resources advisory group chaired by the Vice Principal.